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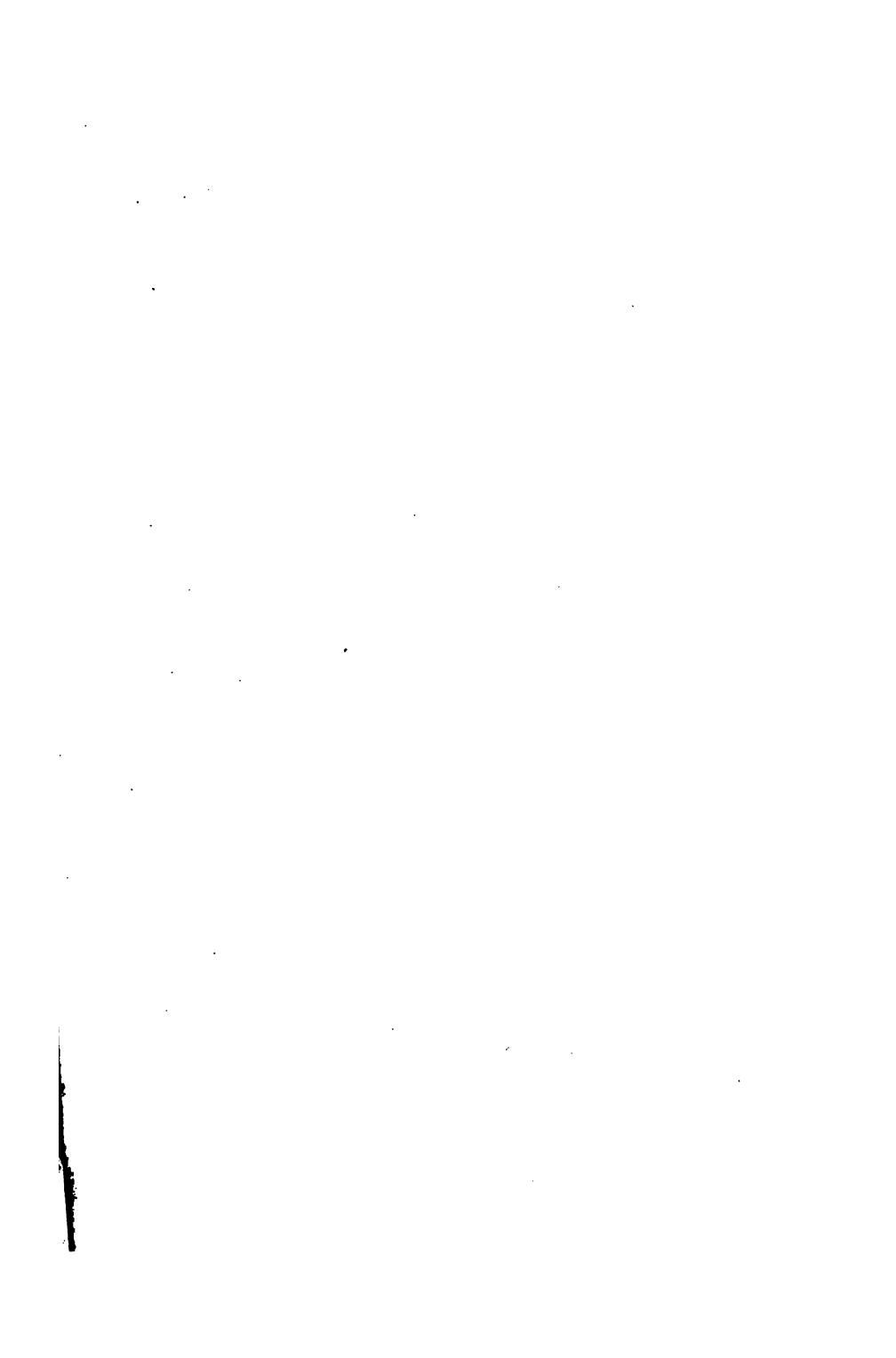


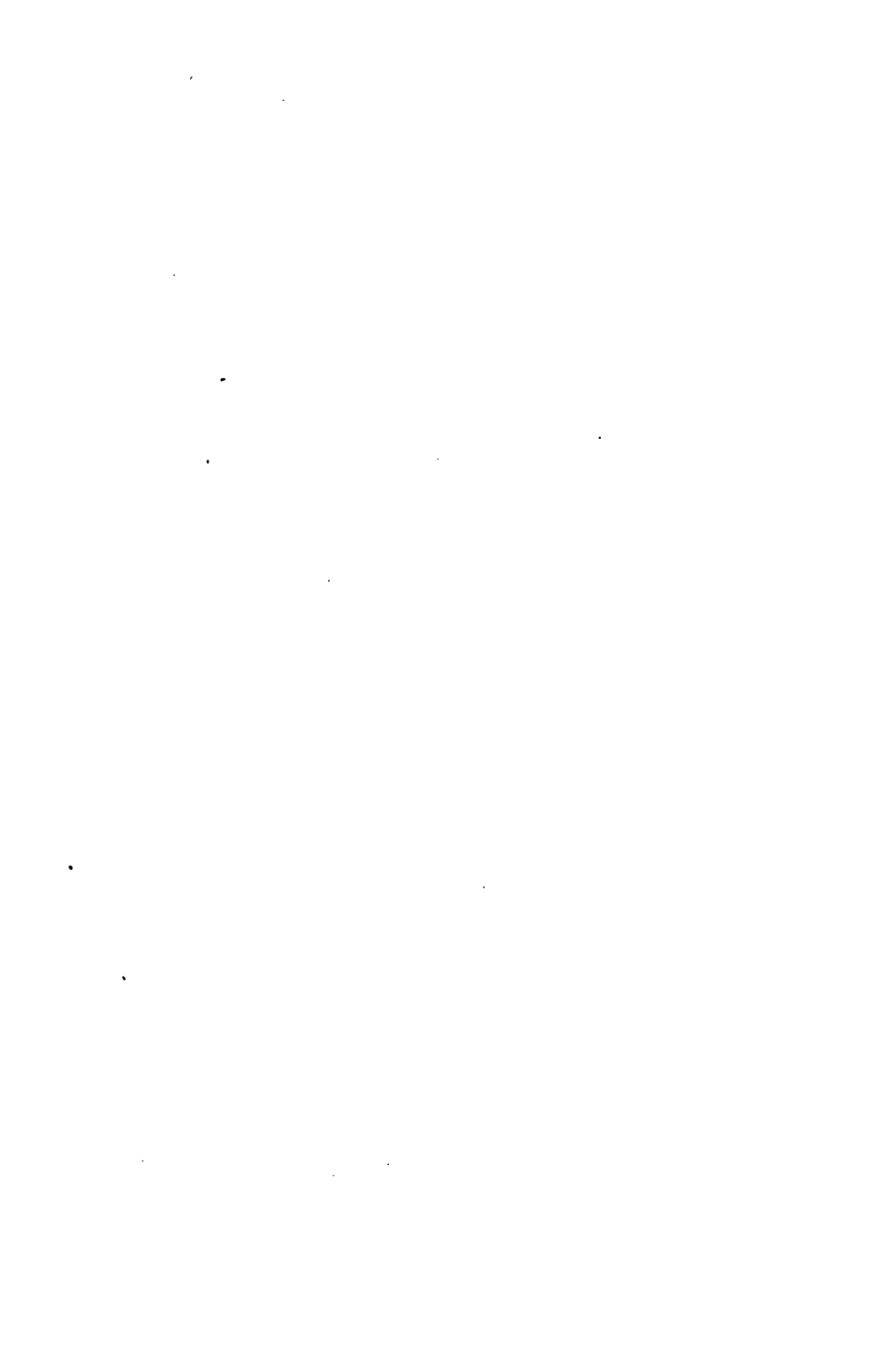
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THE BROKEN LAW



MARRIS-BURLAND





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She, poor soul, flung suddenly from the heights of passion into the horrors of death, was unable to think or act for herself.
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THE BROKEN LAW

J. B. Burland
BY
J. B. HARRIS-BURLAND 3

AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK MOTOR-CAR"
"THE FINANCIER," ETC., ETC.

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TO
MY DEAR WIFE

1924

JUN

L. D.

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THE BROKEN LAW

BOOK I

I

THE UNFINISHED TASK

"You are quite sure you have made no mistake?" asked George Crawshay quietly.

"I have made no mistake," the specialist answered. "In a case like this it is impossible to make a mistake. I can only confirm what your own doctor told you."

He turned away from the eyes of the man to whom he had given the sentence of death. It was his duty to speak the truth—the hardest and most cruel duty of every great specialist. It is easier to watch men die.

"Well, well," said Crawshay gaily, "one mustn't grumble; I've had a good deal of fun in my time, and a good deal of trouble too—just enough to give a spice to life—eh, doctor? I don't think much of a placid existence. Too much like a slug, eh? Well, there, it's not your business to deliver opinions on how to get the most out of life. You're chiefly concerned with the end part of the show. Good-bye, Sir William, I know you're busy—oh, by the by, your cheque," and he walked over to a mahogany desk which stood against the wall.

"Please post it on to me," said Sir William Dale.

"Oh, no; you'd better take it. One never knows what might happen, and there might be some quibble about the

amount after I—it's better to give it to you now, if it won't hurt your professional pride to take it."

He sat down at the desk, wrote out a cheque, crossed it, blotted it, and placed it in an envelope. Then he rose to his feet and handed the fee to Sir William Dale.

"The envelope," he said with a smile, "hides the offence. You great men are touchy about such things, I know. Well, I've written lots of cheques to doctors in my time, and I hope this is the last. At any rate, I've got something definite for my money."

The great specialist frowned. The tone of levity jarred on his feelings. But he took the envelope and placed it in his pocket.

"Thank you," he said gently. "I'm sorry—very sorry——"

"Tush, man!" interrupted Crawshay sharply. "There's nothing to be sorry about. You're only the knife, after all. And the hand that uses you, is a hand that slays and spares not. Good-bye, Sir William; I'll follow out all your directions, though you confess they're worthless."

He held out his hand, and the great doctor gripped it in silence. Then Sir William Dale left the room, thought over the case for a few minutes as he drove home in his brougham, and dismissed all thought of Crawshay from his mind.

Crawshay walked over to the window and watched the carriage drive away from the door.

Then he turned from the window and walked towards the fireplace. The room, handsomely furnished with oak and mahogany, glowed cheerfully in the light of the flames.

He threw himself into a deep, wide easy-chair and stared at the blazing oak logs in the grate. There was no sign of emotion on his thin, clean-shaven face. Sir William Dale had only confirmed the words he had listened to more than a year ago. He cared little for life. He was forty years of age, and though his intellect had barely reached its

prime, he knew that the life of his body was passing the summit of its strength.

Yet there is a purpose in every life. It may be pleasure, it may be ambition, it may be love, it may be merely a desire to earn the bare necessities of existence. But it is there, in every man or woman, and it is that which makes it so hard to die.

And it was that which occupied the mind of George Crawshay as he stared into the fire and thought over his sentence of death. The last ten years of his life had been devoted to a single task. Now he knew that he would have to die and leave his task unfinished.

A good man, forced to relinquish his life-work, might have looked back on the past years with a feeling that he had not wasted his time, and that, though he had been called away before he had accomplished his task, yet what he had already done would be counted to his credit on the last great day of reckoning.

But George Crawshay was not a good man, and the task that he had set himself to do was not a worthy one. He had spent ten years of his life in a vain endeavour to take vengeance on a man.

And now, when death was close to him, he did not even know the name of the man whose destruction he had sought and planned.

There was nothing paltry or mean in this long and useless search. It had been grim, earnest, terrible. It had been undertaken for the love of an only sister. It had become the all-absorbing passion of his life. Looked at from a worldly point of view it had been fine, even noble, in its intensity. But now, with the shadow of death creeping across the floor, how bitter seemed the memory of these wasted years! Their only possible reward was success; and George Crawshay had failed to achieve it.

"If I could only find him!" he murmured as he gazed into the fire. "If there were only time to do this! But

it is too late. Violet, it is too late. And this is the real bitterness of death."

He rose to his feet, and walked slowly across to a table which stood in a corner of the room by the door. On the table there was a large oaken box bound and clamped with curiously wrought iron. It was a mediæval treasure, and had once perhaps held the jewels of some fair daughter of Venice. Now it contained the records of the work of ten years.

He lifted it from the table and placed it on the hearth-rug. Then he took a key from his pocket and turned it in the lock. Then he sat down before it, and, opening the lid, gazed thoughtfully at the contents.

"This," he said to himself, "is all that I have to show for the labour of ten years."

He took out a packet of papers and letters and glanced at the date. Then he smiled grimly. That represented the work of one year, and he had been only thirty-one when he had written the date across it in blue pencil. There were many similar packets in the box, and each one contained the result of a year's work; clues taken up, hotly pursued, and abandoned; memoranda of interviews with detectives; receipts for money spent in the search; letters from people who had known the girl; letters from people who thought that they had seen her after she left her home.

He picked up one of the packets and poised it in his hand, as though about to fling it into the fire. Then he hesitated, and dropped it into the box.

"Not yet," he said to himself. "I will not burn them yet."

One by one he replaced them in their casket; then he turned the key in the lock and carried the box to the table. It was a pitiable scene. George Crawshaw, white-faced and trembling, with all the sum total of ten years' work in that wooden box. He was a man of fine intellect, and of untiring energy; yet all strength of body and mind had been

used up to accomplish this—a mere pile of waste paper that would soon be cast into the flames.

He returned to his chair and stared into the fire. Then, suddenly, the sweat poured from his forehead, and for a few moments he writhed in agony with his hands pressed to his heart. Then he staggered to his feet and groped his way across the room, and felt blindly for a bottle on his desk. He found it, opened it, and placed it to his white lips.

For a moment he stood still, and the air was a web of mist and dancing lights, and there was the roar of some great vibration in his ears. Then the mist cleared away and the lights vanished, and the roar died down into the steady beat of his own heart.

He walked back to the fireplace and looked at his watch. He knew that he was near to death, and he did not intend to spend the evening in thinking about it. He wanted laughter, song, wine, the smiles of a woman—anything that would make him forget. There was little enough time left for pleasure, and he could not afford to lose a minute of it. He went into his bedroom to dress for dinner. As he was tying his white tie with scrupulous care a servant knocked on the door.

“A gentleman to see you, sir.”

“Ask him to wait,” replied Crawshay. “I’ll see him in two minutes.”

II

RAKEHELL GAUNT

CRAWSHAY completed his toilet with deliberate slowness and exactitude. The knowledge that he was to die in a few weeks had not deprived him of his regard for the smaller niceties of life. He was, if anything, more particular than usual about his personal appearance. His tie was a triumph. There was not a speck of dust on his clothes. His boots shone like mirrors.

He looked at himself in the long pier glass and smiled grimly. Then he returned to his sitting-room.

As he entered, a tall, clean-shaven man rose to his feet.

"Hello, Gaunt."

"Evening, Crawshay. Are you doing anything to-night?"

"Nothing particular."

"Well, come and dine with us. Miss Paradine asked me to bring one or two men. It'll only be a sort of cold meal. Carfax is coming."

"Thanks, I should like to."

"Good. We're not expected till eight, and it's now seven. I came early, in case you might have gone out."

"Have a sherry and bitters."

"I think a brandy and soda is more in my line."

Crawshay poured out half a tumbler of brandy and filled it up with soda water. Gaunt drank a third of it in a single gulp and then lit a cigarette with trembling hands. Crawshay smiled, and pouring some brandy into a liqueur glass, sipped it thoughtfully.

Sir Richard Gaunt's handsome face told the story of his life. The flesh was white and unhealthy; the eyes dull and listless; the mouth cruel and sensual. He was only thirty-

three years of age, but feeble and tremulous as a man of sixty. Even Crawshay, who was so near to death, was a better specimen of a man to look at.

Bacon has said that a man who is young in years may be old in hours, if he have lost no time. Sir Richard Gaunt had certainly lost no time in doing evil, and he was old in many hours of vice. From the age of nineteen he had led the worst kind of life that a young man can find in a great city; and even among a set of men, who were excluded from every decent house in London, he had achieved a reputation for being the worst and wildest of them all. If only half the reports of his escapades were true, he was as evil-minded a scoundrel as had ever disgraced one of the historic names of England.

Crawshay had been acquainted with Gaunt for little over a year, and though he was disgusted with the brutal depravity of the man, he was morbidly interested in him, much in the same way as a student of criminology might be interested in a murderer. Gaunt, moreover, could be a very pleasant companion when he chose to exert himself. Crawshay was pleased to see him on this particular evening. For a reckless man, who intended to spend an evening of wild pleasure, there was no more fitting company than Sir Richard Gaunt.

The visitor did not speak till he had finished the glass of brandy and soda. Then some light of intelligence came into his dull eyes, and his face, which at first might have been carved out of white putty, showed some signs of animation.

"We'll have a tremendous spree to-night, Crawshay," he said with a chuckle. "Cynthia's promised to give us that new Moorish dance. And it is a dance, I can tell you. It was a bit too thick for the 'Folies Bergères,' so I'm told."

"That's good," replied Crawshay abstractedly.

"Not quite the thing to-night, are you?" asked Gaunt.

"Not quite."

"Old trouble, eh? Well, I expect you're fretting too much. Sir William Dale will knock all that nonsense out of your head. When do you see him?"

"I saw him about an hour ago."

"Oh," said Gaunt, with a look of pity. Then he was silent, and for a few moments both men stared into the fire.

"Bad news, eh?" he asked, after a pause.

"That depends on how you look at it, Gaunt. There's no more uncertainty, anyway. He's given me a few months."

"Phew!" said Gaunt. He did not know what to say. So far as his selfish mind and callous nature could form an attachment for anyone, he was attached to this thin, cynical invalid. But his mind could not grasp the thought of death, and he was unable to frame any words of sympathy.

"For some things I'm glad," said Crawshay. "In fact, there's only one thing that worries me."

He looked steadily at Gaunt's evil face, and, as he did so, a strange and wild idea came into his mind. This man was hard pressed for money. He wondered if——

"What about the five hundred pounds you owe me, Gaunt?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, that'll be all right," Gaunt replied, with an uneasy laugh. "It's not that which is worrying you, old chap, is it?"

"No, it's not that," Crawshay replied; "but look here, Gaunt, you're hard up, I suppose, as usual."

"Shockingly hard up."

"I thought so. My executors may press you for that money. You gave me a bill, eh?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"The bill is due. And, of course, you can't pay the money."

"Not just at once, Crawshay. But my rents are coming in next month."

"Rents?" said Crawshay, with a laugh. "Oh, yes, of course. But I fancy Cynthia is rather an expense, eh?"

Sir Richard Gaunt scowled. A sharp reply was on the tip of his tongue, but he restrained himself.

"You spend a lot of money on yourself," continued Crawshay remorselessly; "your estates are mortgaged. You owe——"

"Look here," exclaimed Gaunt fiercely, "you've said enough, Crawshay. I won't stand it. All this is none of your business."

"On the contrary," Crawshay replied, "it is my business. You owe me money."

"Oh, damn you and your five hundred pounds!" cried Gaunt. "What's the use of money to you now?"

"Thank you," said Crawshay coolly. "I am obliged to you for reminding me."

"I'm sorry," said Gaunt in a sullen voice. "But you drove me to it. You shall have your money to-morrow. I'll get it from old Joseph's at sixty per cent. Then perhaps you will let me spend my money as I please."

Crawshay lit a cigarette and looked steadily at the white puffy face.

"Another drink?" he asked quietly. Gaunt held out his glass and his host mixed a strong brandy and soda.

"It's like this," said Crawshay, who had not resumed his seat, but had taken his stand with his back to the fireplace. "I'm a very rich man, Gaunt, and I've thought of leaving you some money in my will. But in return you'll have to do something for me, and something unpleasant for a nice, gentle fellow like yourself."

"What is it?" asked Gaunt. "One'll do a lot for money in these days."

"For ten years," said Crawshay, "I've been looking for a man, and now I've got to give up the search. I'll leave

you thirty thousand pounds in my will if you'll do the job."

"Phew!" exclaimed Gaunt. "Thirty thousand pounds!"

"Yes; and another five thousand for expenses connected with the search."

"You make my mouth water. Well, what's the Crawshay?"

"Ten years ago," said Crawshay slowly, "a man seduced my sister to leave her home. He did not marry her. We know that much. I have been looking for the man."

"The blackguard!" cried Gaunt, with genuine feeling.

"Yes," said Crawshay, "he was a blackguard; just such another as you and I, Gaunt."

"It's entirely different," Gaunt replied. "We have to protect girls of our own class. Neither you nor I would attempt to harm them."

"No; they are too well guarded."

"Bah! It is not that, Crawshay. You know well enough what I mean. The others are fair sport."

"Yes; perhaps that is so. Though I often wonder if virtue is not as valuable to a shop-girl as to a duchess. One might even assume that it is more valuable to a poor girl, as it is often the only thing of value she has in the world."

"Rats!" said Gaunt, with a laugh. "It's entirely different, and you know that well enough."

Crawshay picked up his liqueur glass and drained it to the last drop. Then he reseated himself in his chair and lit another cigarette. His thin, white face was hard and stern, and his lips were pressed tightly together.

"I'll tell you something about it," he said, after a long pause, "as much about it as I wish you to know at present. In the first place, you will be interested to learn that my sister was one of that class which you—not without rea-

son—regard as ‘fair sport.’ She was, in short, a shop-girl.”

“Your sister? A shop-girl?” exclaimed Gaunt.

“Precisely. She was a shop-girl. I am not a gentleman by birth. Doubtless you have noticed it in my manners.”

“They are, if anything, too correct. You are too courteous, too gentle, too well-bred, if I may say so.”

“I understand,” Crawshay replied, with a grim smile.

“Well, Gaunt, I was a counter-jumper little more than fifteen years ago. It was probably in the shop that I learned my manners. We were always very polite, and I acquired a bow that would not have disgraced an Oriental.”

“Well, I’m blowed!” said Gaunt.

“I got sick of the shop,” continued Crawshay, “and went out to Australia. I left behind me a sister who was ten years younger than myself, and my mother, who was a widow. They were both earning money. My mother did a little dressmaking, and my sister was, as I said, a shop-girl. I had ambitions. I wanted to see them both rich. I went abroad to make money, to find gold.”

“And you found it?” queried Gaunt.

“Yes, I found it—after five years. And a week afterwards I received a letter from my mother saying that my sister had disappeared. I sold my bit of ground for a lot of money, and returned to England to find her. When I arrived, I learnt that my mother had died two days previously.” He paused and the lines seemed to deepen on his thin face.

“Poor old chap!” muttered Gaunt.

“She died of a broken heart,” continued Crawshay—“of shame. They found a letter in her stiff fingers—a letter from my sister, saying that she was neither wife nor maid, that she was to be forgotten, that she was to

be looked upon as dead. I have the letter in my pocket now. It has been there for ten years. It never leaves me."

"The brute! The blackguard!" exclaimed Gaunt.

"Just such another as you or I, Gaunt. Only we do not see this side of the business. We are in the sunshine and the laughter; and the voice of passion drowns all the cries of pain. But I swore to find this man and kill him, and now—well, I have perhaps two months to live."

"And you wish me to continue the search," said Gaunt, "and to kill him?"

"No," replied Crawshay, "that would be absurd. Of course, I could not expect you to commit a murder. But I should require you to hunt him down, and wreck his happiness by every means in your power. Doubtless he is married, and the respected father of a family. It will be your duty to expose his past life and show the man as he really is. You must try to ruin him morally and financially. You must never leave him till he has taken his own life in order to escape from your persecution."

"And in return for this I get thirty thousand pounds?"

"Yes, and five thousand pounds for expenses."

"May I ask how you intend to leave the rest of your money?"

"I suppose you mean to ask why I should not leave it all to you. Well, there is no reason why I shouldn't tell you. I intend to leave the rest of my money to my sister, if she can be found. If she cannot be found within five years of the date of my death it is to be devoted to a scheme for the rescue of fallen women. I hope to make amends for some of the evil that men like you and I have wrought in the world."

Gaunt laughed derisively, and then was silent. He was apparently debating in his mind whether to accept the offer or leave it. His face looked cruel and sensual in the firelight. Perhaps he was thinking of all the pleasures that thirty thousand pounds could buy for him.

"Well?" said Crawshay, after a long pause.

"Why have you honoured me with this proposal?" asked Gaunt. "Why have you picked me out for the business?"

"For several reasons. Because you are an utterly unscrupulous man; because it will do you no harm to have a definite purpose in life; because it is good policy to set a thief to catch a thief."

Gaunt rose to his feet, and his eyes blazed with anger.

"I'll have nothing to do with it," he exclaimed savagely. "The whole thing is monstrous and ridiculous. One might as well be dead as spend one's life in a job of this sort."

"Yet thirty thousand pounds is a good bit of money."

"Thirty thousand pounds would be too little. Besides, I'm not such a mean skunk as you think. This man has never done me any harm. If you want to ruin or kill him, well and good. That's right enough. But why should I, a complete stranger, worry the poor brute to death? Probably he's repented long ago. If I were in your place, I should do just the same, but to do it for money is different. I should be a hired cut-throat; and I'm not such a low beast as you think, Crawshay."

"All right, my dear fellow," said Crawshay quietly, "there is no need to lose your temper. Let us consider the matter closed. Of course, what I have told you is confidential."

"Of course," burst out Gaunt angrily. "'Pon my word, Crawshay, you seem to think——"

"Fill up your glass," interrupted Crawshay, "and then we ought to be off, if this supper is at eight o'clock."

He rang the bell and told the servant to call a cab. He was annoyed with both Gaunt and himself. He had failed to carry out an idea which had only occurred to him on the spur of the moment, and he could not understand why he had failed. Doubtless he had handled the matter rather clumsily.

III

THE FEAST

"BRAVO, Cynthia!" yelled Sir Richard Gaunt. "Bravo! Bravo!"

"Rippin'!" shouted Crawshay, his white face flushed with excitement. "Encore, Cynthia, give it us again."

"Encore," mumbled young Lord Carfax thickly. "Beashly clever! You little darling."

"Shut up!" said Gaunt angrily, "and don't talk to Miss Paradine like that. You're drunk."

Lord Carfax tried to rise to his feet, but the effort was too much for him, and he collapsed in the armchair.

"Beashly drunk yourself, Dick," he muttered.

"Please dance again," said Crawshay, with an eager look in his eyes.

Cynthia Paradine faced the three men and bowed. She was a girl of superb and dazzling beauty. Her dark hair, her lustrous black eyes, and her lithe and supple form proclaimed her a daughter of the South. She was, as a matter of fact, the child of a Spanish Jew and a slave girl from Morocco. Her cheeks were flushed with exertion, and her eyes sparkled. She was dressed in a gown that had cost Sir Richard eighty guineas, and the diamonds on her corsage represented a year's rental of half a dozen farms in the Welsh hills.

"Give us another, Cynthia," cried Sir Richard, walking unsteadily across the room to the table and pouring out a glass of champagne. "Just one more, Thea."

"Give me a drink," she said sharply. "I'm done up. You men don't know what a dancer puts into that sort of work. I'd like to see Lord Carfax do it for thirty seconds."

"Beashly clever," muttered Carfax, who was big, fat, and indolent. "'Pon my word, Thea——"

"Miss Paradine, if you please," said Gaunt, bristling at the sound of the pet name he had given the girl in the early days of their intimacy.

"Shall call her Thea," retorted Lord Carfax.

"If you do," cried the young baronet, "I'll screw your head off, fat and big though you are, Carfax."

George Crawshay, who was comparatively sober, rose to his feet and laid his hand on Gaunt's arm.

"Don't be an ass, Dick," he said sternly. "Can't you see he's drunk? Miss Paradine is waiting for her wine."

Sir Richard Gaunt scowled at the placid form of Lord Carfax, and then poured out another glass of wine, which he carried across to Cynthia Paradine. She drained the glass to the last drop and then placed her lips close to his ear.

"Don't be cross," she whispered, "and don't have any more to drink, that's a dear."

He seized her hand and kissed it, and then led her to a seat.

"Please give us another dance, Miss Paradine," said Crawshay.

"I don't think so," she replied with a laugh. "One must consider the people in the flat underneath."

"Bother the people underneath," said Lord Carfax.

"They're harmless enough, Lord Carfax," said Cynthia. "Just an old man and his wife. They're often complaining about the noise up here. I expect they'll send a note up presently. Give me a cigarette, Dick."

Sir Richard Gaunt held out a gold case, and for one brief moment his mind reverted to his home on the wild coast of Wales. His mother had given him that cigarette case on his twenty-first birthday. Then he glanced at the room, thick with tobacco smoke, at the table covered with decanters, glasses, and dessert, at the hot, passionate

face of Cynthia Paradine, at the flushed features of Lord Carfax. The sea was as far distant from all this as the North Pole from the Equator.

"We want some fresh air in the room," he said huskily. "It's stifling."

"Cynthia mush sing," mumbled Carfax, "or she mush dance."

"Shut up!" said Gaunt angrily, as he stumbled over to the window and flung it open.

"Thea mush sing," reiterated Carfax. "I shay she mush sing—no, she mush dance."

He rose heavily to his feet, as the fresh cold air revived him a little from his drunken stupor, and held on to the back of his chair.

"Little darling," he said with a drunken leer, "will Thea sing if I give her a kiss, eh?" and he blundered across to her side. Crawshay rose and caught him by the arm. But Lord Carfax was a big man, and the feeble hand of the invalid was not strong enough to force him back into his chair.

"Sit down, you drunken beast!" yelled Gaunt, stumbling forward with clenched fists and his white face convulsed with fury. "Sit down, or get out of the place altogether."

Cynthia laid a restraining hand on his arm, and he paused, quivering with drunken rage. He had had less to drink than Lord Carfax, and his speech was clear enough, but his brain was inflamed with alcohol, and he had lost all control of his reason.

"Dick, Dick!" cried the girl, as she looked up piteously into his face.

"Get out, Carfax," cried Gaunt fiercely, "or I'll chuck you out."

"You chuck me out?" said Lord Carfax. "I'd like to shее you. Come, Thea, darling, jush one kiss like you gave me lash night; don' mind that feller."

Gaunt gave a cry of rage, tore his arm from Cynthia's grasp, and rushed at Carfax.

Then what happened was so swift and terrible that no one had time to interfere. Carfax, who was a young man of great strength, flung Crawshay to the ground with one movement of his arm, and clutching Gaunt round the waist, bore him backwards onto the table. There was a clatter of knives and crockery, and a scream from Cynthia, and the next moment the great fat hands of Carfax were at Gaunt's throat. But they were only there for three seconds. Gaunt's hand closed on an overturned bottle, there was a crash, a tinkle of broken glass, and Lord Carfax staggered back with the blood pouring from his forehead. Then he fell heavily backwards on to the fender, and there was silence.

Gaunt lay motionless on the table for a few moments, while Cynthia and Crawshay rushed to the side of the fallen man. Then he rolled over on to his face, and lifted himself to his feet. The neck of the bottle was still in his hand.

"You've killed him," cried Crawshay quietly.

"Send for a doctor!" cried Cynthia, who crouched, white and quivering, on the floor, and held the limp, warm hand of the fallen man.

"Don't be a fool," said Gaunt. "He's only stunned. Get some water and bathe his forehead."

"He's dead," said Crawshay in a low voice. "His neck was broken in the fall. He must weigh thirteen stone."

"Send for a doctor!" moaned Cynthia.

"No!" said Crawshay sharply. "He is dead, and a doctor can do no good. I can tell you that he is dead. We must think what to do."

"It was an accident," said Cynthia quickly; "we must all say it was an accident. He fell on the fender. He was drunk."

Crawshay pointed to the terrible gash on the dead man's forehead. The blood had already ceased to flow from it.

"When a man falls," he said quietly, "he does not strike the ground with both the back and front of his head."

"He is not dead!" exclaimed Gaunt doggedly. "He is only stunned!"

"Oh, yes, he is dead," replied Crawshay. "His heart has ceased to beat. See, his jaw has dropped. What are you going to do? Shall we send for the police?"

"Yes," cried Gaunt; "but not yet. I will go at once. I will leave the country."

"You will be caught," said Crawshay, rising to his feet. "It will be an ugly business, Gaunt."

"What do you advise me to do?"

Crawshay was silent, and looked steadily at the face of the dead man. He had not looked upon death since his mother had died, and the memory of that far-off day returned to him.

"I will help you," he said after a pause. "Leave the flat at once, and I will send for the doctor."

"And what then?" asked Gaunt.

"I will tell him about the quarrel, and the—the accident. But I will say that I did it myself."

"You?" cried Cynthia.

"Nonsense," said Gaunt. "Do you think that I could——"

"Listen to me," Crawshay interrupted hastily. "It will only be a case of manslaughter. The verdict doesn't matter to me. I have, as you know already, been sentenced to death. The doctor gives me six months, perhaps less, to live. Probably I shall be dead before I am put in the dock."

"It is impossible!" cried Gaunt. "Are you mad? Why should you do this?"

"Ask Miss Paradine to leave the room for a few moments, and I will tell you."

Gaunt did not speak, but he looked at Cynthia, who still crouched by the fender staring at the dead man's face.

"Please leave us alone, Miss Paradine," said Crawshay quietly.

She did not move, but moaned feebly. Her face was ghastly white, save for two patches of rouge which flamed out on her cheeks. A long, thick strand of her hair, loosened by the dancing, had fallen on her smooth, bare shoulders.

"Miss Paradine," said Crawshay sternly, "please be calm. This is a time when we must keep our wits about us."

She did not reply, and the man stooped down and grasped her roughly by the arm. She did not resist as he dragged her to her feet, and allowed him to lead her to the door. "Please go into your room for a minute. I want, if possible, to save Gaunt. I suppose you want him to be saved?"

He opened the door, and she passed slowly through it, like a woman walking in her sleep. Then he closed and locked it, and returned quickly to Gaunt's side.

"Look here, Gaunt," he said sharply, "if you'll do what I asked you to do a few hours ago, I'll take all the blame of this matter on my own shoulders; and if there's to be any punishment, I'll take that too."

Gaunt did not answer, but stared stupidly at the face of the dead man.

"Quick!" cried Crawshay, "which is it to be? Yes or no?"

"I—I can't tell you," stammered Gaunt with a look of fear in his eyes. "Give me time—time to think."

"Time to think!" exclaimed Crawshay. "Not a minute

—not twenty seconds. The doctor must be fetched at once, or else it will look like murder. Which is it to be? Yes or no?"

"Yes," muttered Gaunt, moving towards the door with his eyes still on the face of the dead man.

"Is there any oath that'll bind you? Is there anything you hold sacred?"

"I will keep my word. I am a gentleman, if I am a blackguard."

"Well, swear to me by all you hold most sacred that you will hunt down the man who dishonoured my sister, that you will devote your life to the task, and that, if you find him, you will hound him to ruin and death. I'll leave you the money. But swear the oath."

"I swear to do this," said Gaunt faintly. "I will look for him till I find him, and will not consider myself absolved from my oath till he is dead."

He glanced at the body of Lord Carfax and shuddered. Then he suddenly stepped forward and knelt down and laid his hand on the dead man's sleeve.

"May the dead rise up against me and destroy me," he whispered, "if I do not keep my oath."

"That will do," said Crawshay. "I'll see that all the evidence is placed in your hands. Now clear out as quickly as possible. You left here at ten o'clock. Can you remember that?"

Gaunt walked unsteadily towards the door, unlocked it, and then paused.

"It might be a friend of mine," he said hoarsely. "I did not think of that."

Crawshay shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think you'd care if it was," he answered.

Gaunt turned on his heel, and closed the door softly behind him.

When Gaunt had left the flat, Crawshay knocked at the door of Cynthia's room.

"I want to speak to you," he said hurriedly. "Please come out at once."

She opened the door and came out into the passage.

"Not in there!" she exclaimed. "I won't go back into that room! Come here!"

She led the way into a small boudoir, and turned on the electric light. There was no fire in the grate, and Crawshay shivered as he entered the room.

"Please sit down," he said quickly. "I want to have a few words with you before I go for a doctor."

"It is cold," she muttered.

"I'll get you a cloak. Where is it?"

"In the other room."

He went out and returned with a fur-lined opera cloak. She huddled herself in it till only her eyes looked out at him through the sable collar.

"Gaunt has gone," said Crawshay. "It is now"—he paused and looked at his watch—"it is now eleven-fifteen. Gaunt left here at ten o'clock. Can you remember that?"

"Yes, ten o'clock. Yes."

"He will have nothing to do with the matter. He left at ten o'clock and knows nothing about it. If he is cross-examined, that is a simple answer to every question."

"Yes."

"A servant waited on us at table," continued Crawshay. "Where is she?"

"She went out directly after the meal. She has been in all day."

"Good. Does your servant usually go out when you have guests?"

"Ye—es."

"I see. Well, when is she likely to return?"

"She won't return to-night."

"Not return?" queried Crawshay. "Do you usually——"

"She's gone to her mother for to-night," interrupted Cynthia, and then she covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

"Well, that's excellent," continued Crawshay "There's nothing to cry about, Miss Paradine. It's most fortunate. That is to say, if you usually——"

"Oh yes, oh yes," sobbed the girl. "For pity's sake——"

"Well now, as to the flats," continued Crawshay. "Is there any one in the hall—a porter, a lift-boy, any one who would see Gaunt leave the place?"

"There is no one."

"Still more excellent. Of course, there might have been some one on the stairs, some chance passer-by, but we must risk that. Now, do you quite understand what is going to happen?"

"I think so," she said faintly.

"I am the man who struck Carfax with the bottle," said Crawshay. "It happened—well, at the time it did happen, say eleven o'clock. We must be truthful. It was done in self-defence. I don't intend to go to prison without a fight for it. Gaunt left here at ten o'clock. That is all you've got to remember. As for the rest, you merely say what actually happened. I hope this is all clear to you."

"Yes," the girl answered. "Yes, it's all clear. But why are you doing this?"

"I've told you. I have only a few months to live. It doesn't matter to me."

"I don't believe you," she said quietly. "You are not the sort of man to make a sacrifice for any one. In return for this Dick is going to do something for you. What is it?"

"You've sized up the situation," Crawshay replied. "Gaunt has got to pay something for this. There is no time now for explanations. All you've got to do is to save him."

He rose to his feet and went out into the hall. The girl followed him.

"Please tell me," she pleaded.

"Not now," he answered, as he put on his overcoat. "Some other time, if I get a chance. If not, Gaunt will tell you himself."

"And you trust Dick?"

"Yes," he replied, as he opened the door, "in this matter I trust him absolutely."

IV

THE MAN

RICHARD GAUNT sat alone in the library of Gaunt Royal, the house which his ancestors had built on the sea coast of Cardiganshire when one of them married the heiress of the Morgans of Llynglas.

For a library the room was singularly destitute of books. Bare oak shelves lined the walls, for the whole place had been stripped of its literary treasures four years after Gaunt attained his majority. The collection, accumulated by his grandfather, who was a bibliophile, had fetched twenty thousand pounds.

Two months had elapsed since the death of Lord Carfax. George Crawshay had been tried for manslaughter, and had received the sentence of six month's imprisonment without hard labour. The judge had made some very unpleasant remarks about the young men, whose birth and education should have saved them from such a scene.

"If this had happened in some East End slum," he had remarked, "I should not have made a comment on the case. As it is, I can only say that all the men concerned seemed to have forgotten that they were gentlemen. There is no question of malice aforethought. The death of Lord Carfax is the result of a drunken brawl. Yet the man who killed him must not go unpunished."

Gaunt had been astonished, and even annoyed at the leniency of the sentence. Six months' imprisonment would have been no great matter after all. It would have been better than a lifetime spent in avenging the wrongs of another man. He was a little soothed by the reflection that Crawshay's illness had affected the sentence, and that

a healthy man would not have been let off so lightly. But, in spite of this, he had come to the conclusion that he had made a mistake.

More than once he had been tempted to come forward and tell the truth. The thought of Crawshay dying in prison was horrible. But he knew that Crawshay himself would keep him to his word, and would face the end with stoic indifference.

And now, this morning, there had come the news of Crawshay's death, and a letter from the executor of Crawshay's will. Gaunt held the letter in his hand, and read the cold, business-like words which conveyed so much more to the reader than the writer of them.

"DEAR SIR,—I regret to inform you that last Wednesday morning Mr. George Crawshay was taken suddenly ill, and died a few hours afterwards. He has bequeathed you the sum of thirty thousand pounds in his will, and has left directions that a box containing private papers is to be sent to you at once. It is already on its way, together with a letter which Mr. Crawshay wrote before his death, and which he wished delivered to you with the box.—I am, your obedient servant,
JOHN SABL."

Gaunt's fingers trembled as he held the sheet of black-edged paper. The search had begun. It was too late to turn back now. The sacrifice had been made, and the debt would have to be settled.

To do Gaunt justice his first thoughts were for the man who had died. George Crawshay had made a great sacrifice; he had made it to gain his own ends, it was true, but the man whose place he had taken, and whose punishment he had endured, was not callous enough to look upon the bargain as a mere affair of business. Crawshay's death had made it something more than that.

Crawshay had died under circumstances which it was impossible to contemplate without pity and horror. Of his own free will he had spent the last few weeks of his

life in a prison. Knowing that he had but a short time to live, he had voluntarily cut himself off from all that might have softened the harshness of death. He might have spent his last days on earth in the peace and comfort of his own rooms; he might have spent them in the whirling vortex of pleasure; he might have fled south to the clear air and sunshine of a warmer climate, and faced death amid the silent grandeur of mountain and sea; all this had been in his power.

Sir Richard Gaunt, who was at heart a selfish voluptuary, could not understand the motives which had prompted Crawshay to sacrifice the last few days of his life, and his reputation for all time, to purchase goods which might never be delivered. It was probable that Gaunt would never find the man who had dishonoured Crawshay's sister. More than once he had thought how easy it would be to take the thirty thousand pounds and dismiss the whole matter from his mind. He had sworn a terrible oath; but then after all, words are only words, and they break no bones. Honour, religion, morality were no more to him than empty phrases. Crawshay would die, and there would be an end of the matter.

But the actual death of Crawshay had presented everything in a new light. The dead man, cool and cynical to the last, had relied largely on stage effect, and he had not failed to produce the impression he had worked for. He knew well enough that Gaunt was an unscrupulous blackguard, but he had not forgotten a trivial incident which had occurred in the early stages of their acquaintance.

They had both gone to see the first performance of Ibsen's "Wild Duck" in England. Gaunt had laughed heartily all through the piece, treating it more or less as a satire on a class of men he cordially detested. But in the last act, when the little girl Hedvig kills herself because she has lost her father's love, he grew very silent,

and, as the lights were turned up after the fall of the curtain, Crawshay noticed that there were tears in his eyes.

"That sort of thing makes a fool of me," Gaunt had said in answer to a few words of ridicule.

"Why, my dear chap," Crawshay had exclaimed, "I'll wager you're responsible for greater tragedies, and that you've never shed a tear for the sufferers."

"It's different on the stage," Gaunt had replied. "When it is put to one like that it is different."

Crawshay had not forgotten this phase of his friend's character. It was not an uncommon one, even in men of a lower and less educated type than Richard Gaunt. The navy who beats his wife, and starves his children to purchase beer, is moved to tears at the picture of the heroine dying in the snow, and shrieks out his execration of the villain as heartily as any good and loving husband. All this is the result of dramatic effect. If Gaunt could have seen some of the episodes in his own life placed upon the stage he would have wept tears of blood.

Crawshay resolved to make good use of his opportunities. The scene was set for the last act of a grim tragedy, and he occupied the centre of the stage. He allowed nothing to soften the horror of that last picture. He refused to send for Gaunt or any of his friends, and died alone. Even in the face of death he was strong enough to do all that would further the accomplishment of his task. He relied on the picture. An innocent man, who was willing to spend his last days on earth in the gloom and shame of a prison in order to avenge his sister's dishonour. Surely that was pathetic enough to touch the heart of one who had wept at the morbid sorrows of the little Hedvig! And this was real life, staged magnificently. The prison, the dying man shut out from freedom and sunshine, the dishonoured name, all these were things that could not fail in their effect.

George Crawshay did not spend the last moments of his life in prayer. His thoughts were not of himself, but of the sister who might have been by his side. He died as he had lived—hard, relentless, and with one idea in his mind. And he guessed that he had not worked and schemed in vain. No man in the world, who knew the circumstances, could look on his death without pity and horror. Sir Richard Gaunt would not dare to break the oath that he had sworn.

And Crawshay was right. His death had produced the effect which he desired. Gaunt was afraid to break his oath. And, as he sat in the library with the letter in his fingers, he realized that he had put his hand to the plough, and there could be no turning back. He was not a scrupulous man, but there were limits, even in the mind of an unprincipled blackguard. And the manner of Crawshay's death had placed the possibility of fraud well beyond those limits. The man was literally and physically afraid to break his word. He was not superstitious, but in a case like this he believed that the very dead would rise up against him if he failed to observe his oath.

Yet what a life lay before him! His first thoughts had been for Crawshay, but, as he sat there in the firelight, he began to think about himself and the magnitude of the task that lay before him. It might be the labour of years to find the man, perhaps the labour of a lifetime. And the finding of the man was but the commencement of a still more difficult and unpleasant piece of work. The man was to be ruined, to be driven to take his own life. It was monstrous and impossible. The man was probably in a position that would place him above all attacks save those of scandal. It would be easy enough to fling mud at him, to publish the story to the world, to perhaps alienate the affections of those who loved him. But there are men who can stand a lot of that sort of thing without flinching. And Gaunt did not see how he

was going to ruin the man, unless the man happened to be in a very humble station in life. It would perhaps be a dangerous job, and it would certainly be a dirty one. Yet he had sworn to attempt it. And he had been paid in advance. He was richer by thirty thousand pounds, and had been spared all the humiliation of being sent to gaol. It was certainly an unpleasant prospect, and his face darkened at the thought of it.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of the butler, the only remaining man-servant in the establishment.

"A box has just arrived for you, sir. It is marked 'urgent.' Williams has just driven up from the station with it."

"Bring it up here," Gaunt replied sharply. "Now, at once."

The arrival of the box did not interest him, and he was not anxious to see its contents. But they had to be seen and examined and thoroughly mastered. It was well to begin the work at once. Besides, the executor had spoken of a letter written by George Crawshay, and that could not fail to be of interest.

The butler returned with a box, and placed it on a table. It was securely corded, and the knots were sealed with red wax. When the man had left the room, Gaunt severed the cords with a knife, cut off the key which was fastened to one of the handles, and turned the key in the lock. As he lifted up the lid he saw a square, clean grey envelope lying on the top of bundles of dirty paper. It was addressed to himself in a handwriting that he hardly recognized. The writing was in pencil, and was feeble and shaky as the writing of a very old man.

Gaunt opened the envelope, drew out the contents, and leaned forward so that the firelight fell on the paper.

"Dear Gaunt," the letter began, "I have ascertained that this letter will be delivered to you, unread by any of

the prison authorities, who have really been very kind to me, and so I write without reserve——”

At this point the handwriting became almost illegible, and Gaunt, after vainly trying to decipher it, was forced to light a candle and hold the paper close to the flame. In the stronger light he was able to master the sentences slowly, one by one.

“I have done my part of the business. It remains for you to do yours. You will find all the evidence which I have collected in ten years. It does not amount to much, but it will save you a lot of trouble.

“If I had seen you personally about the matter, you would not have learnt more. Besides, there might have been some difficulty about the interview.

“You will find the diaries very complete, and, if you read them carefully, you will grasp the whole matter.

“Good luck go with you, and remember, Gaunt, that I have paid you a big price, and I expect some return for what I have paid.

“You will be surprised to find that my sister Violet bears a different surname to my own. The explanation is simple. She is—she was only a step-sister, the child of my mother by a second husband. But I loved her none the less for that.

“It is possible that I shall watch you, although I am dead.—Yours truly, GEORGE CRAWSHAY.”

Gaunt folded up the letter and placed it in his pocket. Then he picked up one of the diaries and opened it, and the first name that caught his eye was that of Violet Hexamer.

He read a few lines of the small, neat handwriting, and then leant back in his chair with a white face and eyes that seemed to be looking far back into the past.

The search, which might have lasted a lifetime, was already over.

V.

FREEDOM

WHEN Sir Richard Gaunt had recovered from the shock of the discovery, and was able to arrange his thoughts, his first feelings were those of relief.

His task was over, and he was a free man. What might have proved a long and wearisome search was already a thing of the past. He could spend his life as he pleased, and he was the richer by thirty thousand pounds. It was, of course, absurd to suppose that a man could be expected to ruin himself and hound himself to death. The spirit of the oath could not possibly be construed to include such a ridiculous task as that. The latter part of the business was, of its very nature, null and void.

Far from being appalled by the extraordinary coincidence, which some men might have regarded as the judgment of God, Sir Richard Gaunt chuckled to himself at the narrow escape he had had. For the past year he had seen a good deal of George Crawshay, and it was certainly most fortunate that the man had died before the completion of his task. A chance word, lightly spoken between two friends, might have provided the clue. Gaunt was not a man who talked much about his past amours, but still there might have been that chance word, and then—well, it was certain that Crawshay would have killed him. A man, whose life is doomed, cares little for the lives of others.

And now Sir Richard Gaunt was safe, and he was the richer by thirty thousand pounds. What more could a man desire? He smiled when he thought how near he

had been to death. He had not known that for ten years a man had been seeking his life. Violet Hexamer had never spoken of her relations. She had only said that they were nothing to her so long as he loved her.

The thought of the unfortunate girl did not trouble him. He had almost forgotten her existence, and he had heard nothing of her since he gave her a thousand pounds, to conclude the episode. She had passed out of his life, like others who had replaced her in his affections. She had been "fair sport," and provided the amusement of an hour. His conscience did not accuse him. He was only thankful that George Crawshay was dead.

He placed Crawshay's letter on the fire, and locked up the box which contained the labour of a man's best years. He had no desire to examine the contents of the box. The letters and the diaries were so much waste paper. They might be humorous to a man who knew that they were useless. But they could be nothing more.

"I will have them burnt," he said to himself, "but for the present—any place will do for them."

He put the box in a corner of the room, and went upstairs to dress for dinner.

He was in a particularly good humour that night. He was always a pleasant companion when he chose to be so, and his mother's thin face brightened as she listened to his cheery conversation. She, poor woman, had suffered much through this son of hers. She only saw him about one week in every year, but she heard more about him than was good for her. He always treated her with kindness, and even with exaggerated respect. But he suffered no interference, and she had long ceased to reproach or even to plead with him.

Lady Gwendolen Gaunt was a *grande dame* of the old school, which did not seek advertisement in the daily papers. The daughter of a Welsh earl, whose pedigree went back to the days of Owen Glyndwr, she set great

store on the claims of birth. Her creed was of the simplest. "High lineage demands respect. It must do nothing to forfeit its right to receive it." The mere possession of wealth did not, in her opinion, entitle a man to ask for homage from the lower classes, nor confer on him the right to dine in the houses of the aristocracy. Thirty years ago these views were common enough, but in an age when the bearers of the greatest names in England were scrambling for gold, hobnobbing with financiers of shady reputation, and marrying into families that had sprung from the gutter, Lady Gwendolen's opinions marked her out as a woman of character.

To such a woman the conduct of her eldest son was particularly painful. She had but little sympathy for the lower classes, unless they happened to be tenants on the Gaunt estates; and the various women whose names had been connected with Sir Richard's escapades were in her opinion more sinning than sinned against. But she wished the name she bore to be kept clean. There were excuses to be found for the follies of a wayward, passionate boy, but none for a man, whose conduct was the talk of London.

The death of Lord Carfax had brought this proud old aristocrat to the last stage of impotent despair. The scandal, the story of the supper, the evidence which showed the relations between her son and Cynthia Paradine, the hideous headlines in the papers reflecting on the conduct of the upper classes; all these had left an indelible stain on her pride. For only one thing was she thankful. Sir Richard Gaunt had not been present at the fatal brawl. Yet the publicity of the whole thing had brought her to the lowest depths of shame.

She had never referred to the subject during the six days which Sir Richard had spent at home. But the man had noticed the change in her attitude towards him, and he knew well enough that she had suffered and was still

suffering. Occupied with his own worries, he had relapsed into sullen silence, and at some of their meals—the only time they spent together—he had barely uttered a single word.

To-night, however, there was a marked change in his behaviour. He smiled, and even joked in a quiet orderly fashion. He talked about the estate, and certain improvements which he contemplated. He asked questions about the tenants, and appeared to take an interest in their complaints and private troubles. Lady Gwendolen snatched at the opportunity, and related a long tale of grievances which had been poured into her ears from time to time.

“I’ll see Williams to-morrow morning,” he said genially, as they sat over their dessert. “I shall not be leaving till the midday train.”

“I did not know you were leaving to-morrow.”

“Yes, I am going to town.”

“I think it is a pity you do not spend more time here, Dick,” she said gently. “The tenants don’t like it.”

“I’m sorry,” he replied. “But I don’t live for the benefit of the tenants.”

“Some one ought to be here. I do all I can, but there are so many things that a woman cannot see to.”

“Well, there’s Henry,” he said, with a sneer. “I’m sure he’s all that he should be—a dutiful son, a man of business, a loving brother. Henry gave me some excellent advice the last time I saw him.”

“I wish you wouldn’t speak like that of your brother, Dick. It’s not good form.”

He laughed. He cordially detested his brother Henry, who was his exact antithesis in almost every respect, and whose vices, if he could be said to have any, were those of a successful and virtuous prig.

“How is old Henry?” he asked, after a pause. “Making money, I s’pose, as fast as ever?”

"I believe he is making money," the mother replied stiffly. "In his last letter he said that he had cornered something—I think it was gum arabic. He expects to make one hundred thousand pounds."

"In trade, eh?" said Sir Richard. "Ha, ha, that's good!"

"There is nothing to laugh at, Dick."

"No, indeed," he replied, "the very idea of a Gaunt of Gaunt Royal making a corner in gum what-d'you-call-it is most tragic."

"I don't like the way you talk of your brother, Dick."

"Oh, it's only my fun. But, look here, mater, if he wants to buy an estate, why shouldn't he buy Gaunt Royal?"

"Buy Gaunt Royal!" she faltered. "My dear Dick, are you mad?"

"Oh, no, I'm trying to look at things in a business-like light. I'm not going to marry, and the estate is in a bad way. It wants a man of business like Henry to manage it."

"Dick!" cried his mother, "my dear Dick. Do you mean to say that you——"

"Oh, let's have no false sentiment about it, mater. I know my faults, and you know 'em too. One of these days this place will be in the market. Then Henry will step forward, like the hero of a melodrama, and he will plank down the gold, and every one will point to him as the man who saved his family by honest work, as the man who was not ashamed to put his back to the wheel, and bare his arms, and all the rest of it. He might as well buy it now, and not be saddled with two properties."

Lady Gwendolen rose to her feet, and there was a hard look on her face.

"You will see Williams to-morrow?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, yes," he replied, rising and opening the door. "I

hope I haven't vexed you, mater, but it's as well to speak what is in one's mind."

"Just as well, Dick," she replied gently. "But I thought you had some affection for this place. I am sorry. You liked it well enough as a boy."

"It was different then," he muttered.

"I wish you would stay here, Dick, and not go back to London."

"It can't be done, I'm afraid," he replied. "I feel like a fish out of water here. I can't breathe. If I could afford it, I'd have a house in town, so that you could spend the winter there. By the by, when is Betty coming back? It's wretchedly dull for you without her."

"She will be here to-morrow morning. The Anwyls are driving her over after breakfast. She'd like to see you before you go."

"It doesn't look like it. She left the day before I arrived."

"It was a long-standing engagement. But she'll be here by ten o'clock. Shall I see you in the drawing-room later on, Dick?"

He hesitated a moment.

"No, mater," he said after a pause. "I've got some letters to write, and shall go to bed early."

"I shall see you in the morning?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Good-night."

Lady Betty had first come to live at Gaunt Royal as a child of ten, when Sir Richard's father had been appointed her guardian. He died five years later, but Lady Gaunt, who had grown to love the girl as her own daughter, could not bear to part from her, and was allowed to continue the guardianship.

When the girl came of age she inherited a considerable fortune, but she continued to live at Gaunt Royal, and refused many offers of marriage. Lady Gaunt at one time hoped that she might marry the eldest son, but as

time went on, and Sir Richard's name was associated with more than one scandal, the mother stifled her hopes, and would even have used her influence to prevent the marriage, if there had been any chance of it taking place.

As a matter of fact, both Sir Richard and Henry Gaunt had proposed to the girl who had been a friend and companion of their boyhood. Henry did not discover that she was a suitable wife for him until she was twenty-five years of age. He was then laying the foundation of a successful business career, and more than one mother had marked him down as a proper quarry for the shafts of their daughter's eyes. He was not in love with the girl, but he liked her well enough, and she had plenty of money. Unfortunately for him, however, Lady Betty was not moved by his business-like statement of his regard.

Sir Richard's love affair had taken place at a very much earlier date. It had commenced when both were mere children, and had become a matter of ancient history when Sir Richard had attained his majority. It had never being anything more than a boy and girl affair. At the age of fifteen the girl had accepted the boy as her true knight and lover, and had worn a small locket in token of the same. At the age of sixteen and a half she had returned the locket, and that was the end of it.

But to-night, as he sat in the dining-room, with a cigarette between his lips, it occurred to him that, after all, there was something in this boy and girl affair which might be used to his advantage. He knew well enough that women often cherished the memory of these early exploits in their craft, in the same way as an angler will have his first salmon stuffed and placed in a glass case. Lady Betty had passed the first bloom of youth, but she was still a handsome woman. It was just possible that life at Gaunt Royal might provide as good sport as any to be found in London.

He took a coin from his pocket, and, flinging it into the air, caught it between his two palms.

"Tails, I go back to Town," he said to himself; "heads, I stay here for a bit."

He lifted up his right hand, and saw the head of the Queen. "So much for you, Bet," he murmured, as he emptied his fourth glass of port. And he chuckled quietly to himself.

VI

RICHARD GAUNT DECIDES

A MILE to the south of Gaunt Royal a broad stretch of meadow land runs down to the edge of the dark slate cliffs. The sea swirls and foams against a fringe of rocks five hundred feet below. Inland there is a vista of slopes and valleys and mountains. The low-lying ground is clothed with woods, but the summits of the hills are smooth and naked, and strewn with large grey stones. Here and there the rock itself pierces the thin covering of soil, and makes jagged scars across the turf.

About eleven o'clock on the morning after Gaunt's discovery of the truth about Crawshay's sister he was leaning his elbows on a low stone wall which ran down almost to the edge of the cliffs. He had not come there to admire the view, which he cordially detested, but to get a little exercise and a breath of fresh air. He had drunk a good deal of brandy the night before, and he wanted to clear the fumes of alcohol from his brain. So he had taken a sharp walk up the steep slope from the house, and had filled his lungs with the sea breeze that swept in from the west to the shores of Cardiganshire.

Although he had no intention of leaving, he had said good-bye to his mother, and had sent his luggage to the station. He proposed to walk there himself, and take a short cut across the hills. He had started before the arrival of Lady Betty Drake, but had told his mother that he was going to spend an hour on the top of the cliff before proceeding on his way to the station. He had his own reasons for doing this, and they were worthy of the man.

He was not vain enough to suppose that Lady Betty

would pursue him. It was hardly to be expected that a woman of her position would actually run after a man. Yet he had made it easy for her to take a walk up the cliffs in the same direction. He had told his mother that he was not well, and that the close air of the valley stifled him. He had expressed a desire to fill his lungs with the breeze from the sea before he left for London. He had also hinted that he would like to see Lady Betty Drake.

He had no baser motive in his mind than a wish to see if she would take the trouble to walk up the cliffs to have a few words with him. He intended nothing more than a mild flirtation, which might lead to nothing, or else a serious one which might lead to matrimony. Like his brother Henry, whose commercial instincts he affected to despise, he had very proper ideas about the value of Lady Betty's inheritance. At present, matrimony would be an insupportable burden, but there might come a time when it would be very useful to marry a handsome, intelligent woman who had a good income. He reflected that Lady Betty was getting on in years, and that she did not meet many men at Gaunt Royal. It would, perhaps, not be difficult to make himself an object of pity, and thence by easy stages he might win her love. It would be a game worth playing, and in its own way as exciting as any of the ignoble games he had played in the past. It would be useful to be loved by a woman with four thousand pounds a year in her own right. And it was not beyond the bounds of probability. Women are said to be secretly fond of a rake, and the best women are glad to reform them.

He leant over the stone wall, and looked down the threadlike path which came winding up the slope from the valley beneath. Versed in every wile which is calculated to touch a woman's heart, he was not long in working out a plan of campaign. Self-abasement was the

surest weapon. He had a whole set of phrases at his finger ends, for he had used them all before.

Five more minutes passed, and then he saw a grey figure far down the slope. A few moments later he recognised Lady Betty. She was hurrying up the path as fast as she could walk. He smiled, and moved down the hill to meet her.

"Ah, Betty," he said, as he shook her warmly by the hand. "It is good of you to come up here. I was afraid I should have to leave without seeing you."

"I wanted to see you, Dick, particularly," she replied. "I don't think it was very nice of you to leave home so early."

"I couldn't help it, Bet," he said humbly, "'pon my soul, I couldn't help it. I was being choked down in that hole. I wanted air, and I knew I could get it up here. I don't often get a chance, you know. By Jove, Bet, you don't look a day older than when I saw you last. This is the sort of place to make one young again."

He looked at her with genuine admiration in his eyes. She was a perfect specimen of a fine type—a healthy, able-bodied Englishwoman in the prime of life. The claims of a season in Town were unknown to her. For the last four years she had experienced none of the weariness of that endless round of dinners, dances, and "At Homes" which would tax the physical strength of an athlete. She had lived her days in the open air and feared neither rain, sun, nor wind. And now, as her face was flushed, and her eyes sparkled with the exertion of a sharp, uphill walk, she was good to look upon. She had beauty and health, and an indefinable air of breeding, which can hardly be acquired by any save those who have mixed with well-bred people from their birth. It was easy to see that she was no longer young, but she had a better complexion than many girls of twenty, and, after all, that is half the battle of a woman's life.

She met Gaunt's impertinent glance with a look of surprise. He was not in the habit of paying her compliments. Then she laughed uneasily.

"It would do you good to stay here a bit," she said quickly. "That's what I want to see you about, Dick. That's why I've rushed up the hill. I want to have a serious talk with you."

"It's no good giving me a lecture, Bet," he replied coldly. "They've all tried it, and that sort of thing irritates me. I'm not doing any harm to you, or Henry, or the mater. You and the mater are snug enough here, and old Henry is perfectly happy making a corner in gum arabic. I've decided on the sort of life I'm going to live, and there's an end to it."

"Please stay here a bit, Dick," she pleaded, "just for a month."

"You're irresistible, Bet, when you look at me like that. Well, then, I'll miss this train, anyway—to please you, mind, to please you, Bet. That means I don't go till to-morrow, for the other trains stop at every station all the way to Town."

"Don't go to-morrow, Dick. Stay here for a month or two, and look after the estates."

"Williams does the work well," he replied, with a laugh, "and if I interfered, I should make a mess of it. Why do you worry me like this, and look so serious about it all? Do you think that my mother is ill?"

"I know that she is very ill," she said gravely, "very, very ill. But if you would only stay here, it would make such a difference. You will never regret it—never as long as you live."

"Poor old mater," he replied. "Look here, Bet, if you really want to do us all a good turn, I wish you'd persuade the mater that I'm not worth worrying about. She's got Henry, as precise and dutiful a son as a woman could want. In a few years' time I shall come to the end

of my tether and die. Then Henry will step into my shoes, and you'll all live happily ever afterwards."

"How can you be so brutal," she exclaimed, "so wicked, so heartless! Do you think that we wish you to die?"

Sir Richard was silent. He did not think so, but he wished to appear in the worst possible light, so that his subsequent conversion might appear the more wonderful.

"Do you really think this, Dick?" she repeated.

"Why not?" he replied. "But there's no need to get excited, Bet. It is sometimes cruel, but it is never wicked to speak the truth. You know well enough that I should not cause nearly so much trouble if I were dead. Now there's Henry. He's making pots of money. I wonder you haven't fallen in love with Henry, Bet. He'd make an excellent husband, and then—when he comes into the estate——"

"How dare you!" she cried, turning as if to leave him.

"Don't go," he said quietly. "Stay here by the sea and get all the fresh air you can. You'll want it after a talk with me. I'll go on to the station and drive back in the carriage. The man will be waiting there for me."

"Oh, Dick," she exclaimed fiercely, "stay with your mother for a month or so. You will never regret it—never."

He looked at her grave, handsome face, and the thought occurred to him that it might be very pleasant to make love to a woman like this. She was so utterly different to the other women of his acquaintance, and it would be a new experience.

And so, while appearing to hesitate, Richard Gaunt made up his mind to stay.

"I'll see, Bet, I'll see," he said, after a long pause. "At any rate, I'll stay to-night. I'll think over what you've said. But I think, if you really want to help my

mother, you'd better try and persuade her that I'm not worth worrying about."

"Surely that is not the way a man should speak of himself."

"It is the way I'm obliged to speak of myself."

"Obliged?" she queried scornfully. "My dear Dick, I do not believe that you are so weak as all that. Live down here for a month and do a bit of shooting. You'll soon get into another way of looking at things."

"Well, I'll see, Bet. It is possible for a man to make a change in his life. But I'm getting on in years, and the clay is too hard to mould. It would require some great force to effect a change."

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply. There was something in the tone of his voice that she did not understand.

"I mean that a man's character is pretty well formed at my age, and that it requires a great upheaval to break it and mould it afresh. But we are getting out of our depths, Bet. I must get along to the station, or the man will wonder what's happened to me. Will you come with me?"

"No, I must get back to your mother. She is not well this morning."

"And you came up here just to ask me to stay?"

"Yes," she replied firmly, "that is why I came after you. You don't suppose——"

"Oh, no, my dear Bet, I didn't flatter myself that you came up to see me. I know you better than that."

"I wished to see you."

"Yes, for my mother's sake."

"Precisely, for your mother's sake."

"Yet there was a time, Bet, when you wanted to see me for my own sake. It was close to this very spot, was it not, that I gave you that ring? It cost seven shillings and sixpence, if I remember aright."

The woman laughed merrily.

"What an excellent memory you have, Dick."

"I sometimes wish I was a boy again."

"And live your life all over again, and make it a different life? Not you, Dick. You'd be just the same."

"I believe I should," he answered quietly. "Well, good-bye, Bet, till lunch. I may be a few minutes late."

He raised his hat and walked off in the direction of the station. He was very pleased with himself. He had started the game and left the woman something to think over. He had worked, like the master of craft that he was, firmly yet delicately. It was like fishing for trout in a clear stream.

The woman watched him till he had disappeared over the edge of the slope. He did not turn to look back at her or wave his hand.

Then she placed her elbows on the stone wall, and supported her face in her hands and looked out across the sea.

The water below was sullen and grey in the light of that winter's morning. No white-capped waves broke the monotonous colour of its surface, but a long swell lifted it up in smooth ridges, and there was a thunder of surf on the rocks below. It was a desolate scene, but the woman loved it, and the sea itself had almost become a friend to her.

Then she turned away from the water, and looked at the ugly white house, which glared up at her from the woods below, and, as she looked, there was a small break in the clouds overhead, and a thin shaft of sunlight smote the grey roof of Gaunt Royal. She took it as a sign.

"Perhaps," she said to herself, "God will send light into his darkness."

But the golden ray vanished as swiftly as it had come, and the woman stared out across the sea, and her lips moved as if in prayer.

VII

A SERIOUS COMEDY

SIR RICHARD GAUNT did not return to London the next day, and when two weeks had elapsed, and he was still trying to adapt himself to an entirely new method of life, his mother began to hope that her prayers had been answered, and Lady Betty congratulated herself on having achieved a most creditable victory.

From the very start Lady Betty's feminine intuition grasped the truth. Sir Richard was making love to her, and making love in such a refined and subtle manner that it almost seemed as though he wished to conceal it. She imagined it to be genuine sentiment, and directly she had arrived at that conclusion she felt it her duty to respond. She had no misgivings about the matter. Here, she said to herself, is a man of bad character who wishes to reform. If I can bring about this reformation by any means in my power, I shall have done a good work. She did not ask herself what the end of it all would be.

And so here were two people, each pretending to be in love with one another, and each playing a part that was so well played as to be mistaken for the actual thing. And herein were all the elements of a very pretty comedy, which might do no harm to either of the parties concerned, and might do a lot of good to Lady Gwendolen Gaunt.

But the fates do not view fraudulent emotions with favour, and, as there was only one touch required to turn the comedy into tragedy, they supplied it.

Lady Gaunt began to notice that there was a certain understanding between the two, and she was not altogether pleased at the discovery. She fancied that her son was

remaining at Gaunt Royal, not from any desire to be with her, but because he was trying to fall in love with Lady Betty.

But this feeling did not last more than a few days. She thrust it aside as selfish and unworthy. And she replaced it with a hope that Lady Betty Drake might save Richard from the slough into which he fallen. Already there were traces of a new influence on his life. And if a marriage could be brought about—a marriage in which there would be no sacrifice—then it was possible that Sir Richard Gaunt might yet become a credit to his name.

It remained for Henry Gaunt to throw an unpleasant light on matters that had far better have been left in obscurity.

This young gentleman, fresh from his triumphs in gum arabic, and £150,000 richer than when he last set foot on Welsh soil, precipitated himself on Gaunt Royal like a very clean and well-ordered avalanche. He announced his intention of coming the same day that he arrived. He might easily have given a week's notice, but it was not his method to do things in that slow style. He loved to move like a motor-car, and inconvenience every one else on the road.

In appearance, Henry Gaunt was a sleek and self-satisfied replica of his elder brother. Both had the broad mouth and long thin nose of the Gaunts, and they were both tall, broad-shouldered, and without an ounce of superfluous flesh on their bodies.

The two brothers disliked each other. This was inevitable where both were utterly selfish and regardless of other people's feelings.

Before Henry Gaunt had been in the house for two days he fancied he had arrived at the truth of his brother's relations to Lady Betty Drake. He thought over the matter for scarcely as many minutes as he would have

given to a new prospectus, and then decided that he must act.

Three days after his arrival he was sitting in the smoking-room with his brother. The two ladies had gone to bed, and both men were smoking in silence. Sir Richard was reading a sporting paper, and Henry was studying a company prospectus which had arrived by that evening's post. They were seated on opposite sides of the fire, and apparently were unconscious of each other's presence.

At last Henry carefully folded up the prospectus and laid it on the mantelpiece. Then he looked steadily at his brother and lit a cigar. The trivial action was characteristic of the man. He did not hurry himself, but his fingers moved smoothly and accurately. The very striking of a match became part of a well-ordered movement.

"Dick," he said abruptly, "this new game of yours must come to an end."

"What do you mean?" Sir Richard asked, without looking up from his newspaper.

"You understand what I mean. This sort of thing can't go on under my mother's roof."

"'Pon my soul, Harry," exclaimed Sir Richard, rising to his feet, "this is a bit too much. I've stood a good deal of your impertinence in the past, but this is a bit too thick. You had better clear out. This is my house, and I'm not going to be lectured in it by any self-satisfied prig, even if he is my brother."

"Pardon me, Dick," was the curt reply, "but this house is not yours. The use of it was left to mother during her lifetime. I am her guest, not yours, and I do not intend to let you play any of your tricks under her roof. You can understand that, once for all."

"Will you kindly explain yourself?" said Sir Richard, trying to keep his temper.

"You understand what I mean. You are making love to Betty."

"And if I am, what has that got to do with you?"

"I do not intend to see you ruin that woman's life, and I certainly do not intend to let you do it in this house."

"That is very kind of you. I am sure Betty would be flattered by your estimate of her character."

"Do you intend to marry her?"

"For aught you know to the contrary, I may be thinking of marriage."

"But you still continue to pay for Miss Paradine's flat in Town."

"Oh, you have been ferreting out that, have you?"

"The matter is public property after that Crawshaw case. But, look here, Dick, I can't say for certain what game you're up to, but I can see trouble ahead, and I'm going to try and prevent it. It would be a crime to let Betty marry a man like you."

"I suppose you would make a more suitable husband!" said Sir Richard, with a sneer. His face was white with anger, and, but for the fact that the clean-living Henry was the stronger man of the two, he might have struck him in the face.

"You've got to clear out," said Henry doggedly, "before you do any more mischief. I can see your whole dirty game. You're playing on the girl's pity, promising to reform, telling her that only the love of a good woman can raise you from the slough into which you have fallen. I can quite imagine all you've said to her. But I intend to open her eyes, and to open my mother's eyes as well, unless you get back to London at once."

"Perhaps you do not know that I am staying here to be with my mother. She asked me to stay, and Betty asked me to stay."

"So I understand," Henry replied coldly; "mother

was talking to me about it this morning. I did not disillusion her. I thought I'd speak to you first."

"Very thoughtful of you, Harry. But I do not see how you're going to get rid of me if I wish to stay."

"I appeal to your good feelings."

Sir Richard laughed derisively. "You've gone about it in a funny sort of way," he replied. "Now, look here, Harry, you've said quite enough. I've not said much, but I won't answer for what I do or say if you continue the subject. I can't imagine how I have controlled myself so far."

"Perhaps the fact that I hold a mortgage on part of your property may have something to do with it."

"I intend to pay you off this week. It is only twenty thousand pounds."

"H'm," said Henry Gaunt, vainly racking his brains for some explanation of this sudden windfall.

"So you can't squeeze me," continued Sir Richard, "and you'd better clear our of this place. And I'd like to tell you, Harry, that for sheer impertinence and bad taste you haven't your equal among all the fellows of my acquaintance. And I know a few rum'uns, too."

"You don't intend to stop this game, then?"

"No, of course not. There is nothing to be ashamed of. Perhaps I love Betty, and want to marry her."

Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he replied. "I shall have to speak to my mother and Betty. I shall have to open their eyes."

"I'm sure they'll be grateful to you. But don't forget, Harry, that my mother is not at all well, and must not be worried."

"I shall do my duty—however painful it may be."

"Trust you for that," retorted Sir Richard, "you blessed peacemaker!"

Henry Gaunt smiled, and left the room.

The next morning Sir Richard Gaunt went a long walk with Lady Betty, and Henry Gaunt stayed at home.

The two pseudo-lovers went far inland and climbed to the summit of Aran Cawddy, a huge, bare cone of slate which dominated all the valley of the Llyn.

"How beautiful it is!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word, Bet, if one could live up on a height like this—always."

"All men can climb," said Lady Betty. The man smiled. He had struck the right note, and the woman did not know how false it rang.

"I sometimes think," he continued, "that I could climb, if a good woman would take me by the hand."

"A man is strong enough to climb by himself," she replied in a low voice. "It is the woman who requires help."

"No," he answered fiercely, "it is not the woman. She is the stronger—morally. She starts life on a higher plane; from her girlhood she is better, purer, truer. But there is one woman in the world who can save me from myself—and that is you. I want your help," he said hoarsely. "I want you to save me. When I am with you I feel as if I could climb, as if I could break loose from the chains that seem to bind me. Bet, will you marry me? You know what a brute I am, how unworthy I am. But I love you, and you can save me from myself."

"Don't speak of this again," she cried hurriedly; "please don't speak of it again. I have done wrong. I am sorry."

"But I thought," he stammered. "Why, Bet, you have led me to think——"

"No, no," she interrupted. "You must not think that. I am so sorry, Dick. You must forgive me. I have done wrong, but it was for your own sake, for your mother's sake."

He looked at her for a moment in amazement, and then he laughed.

"Oh, I see," he said quietly. "You have been having a game with me."

"No," she exclaimed. "No, Dick. But I wished to help you, and I will help you, but you mustn't think——"

He stepped forward and clasped her in his arms, and covered her face with passionate kisses. Then he suddenly let go of her as a man came around a corner of rock which hid the path from view. It was Williams, the agent, red-faced, breathless, and with the sweat pouring from his face.

"Sir Richard—Lady Betty," he gasped, "you must come home at once. The carriage is on the road at the bottom of the hill. They told me you had come up here." He paused, pressing his hand to his side.

"What's the matter?" said Sir Richard angrily, too annoyed at the interruption to think of anything else.

"Her ladyship is ill—she has asked for you. The doctor has been sent for. Please come at once."

Sir Richard turned, and, grasping Lady Betty by the arm, hurried her down the steep, rocky path. He knew well enough what had happened.

VIII

THE HOUSE DESOLATE

WHEN they reached Gaunt Royal, Henry, white-faced and solemn, met them in the hall.

"Well, Henry?" asked Lady Betty anxiously.

"You are too late," he replied gravely.

Sir Richard walked past him without a word, and for the moment there was an ugly look on his face.

Then he and Lady Betty made their way upstairs into the presence of the dead.

"A sudden seizure," said the doctor. "Her heart has been in a bad way for some time. It was all over half an hour after I arrived."

With these few simple words he withdrew from the room and left the two mourners alone.

Lady Betty came forward to the bedside and kissed the cold white face. Then she knelt softly down and covered her face with her hands and prayed.

Sir Richard stood apart. There were no tears in his eyes, and he was not the sort of man to give way to a violent outburst of grief. But in his own selfish way he had loved his mother, and his sorrow was genuine enough. It was made doubly bitter by the thought that he himself was in some way to blame for her death. He scarcely dared to approach the bed, but stood a few feet away from it, and stared fixedly at the kneeling figure of Lady Betty.

Then he turned and withdrew, softly closing the door behind him. He realized that he was not fit to be in the same room with either the living or the dead.

During the next few days Sir Richard Gaunt lived his life apart from the others. He declined to even speak to

his brother, and the few conversations he had with Lady Betty were brief, chiefly connected with the funeral arrangements. He took all his meals alone in the library, and made it clear that he did not wish for the society of any one.

At the funeral itself the two brothers and Lady Betty were the chief mourners, and the whole countryside turned out to do reverence to the family which owned a large but unproductive slice of the county. The demeanour of the three principal figures in the ceremony was correct, and not calculated to call for remark. No one knew that the two brothers were not on speaking terms, and that Lady Betty's sorrow was mingled with a fierce rage against the two men who could bring their quarrels even to the side of their mother's grave.

During the time which elapsed between the death and the funeral, Richard Gaunt had effaced himself, but directly the ceremony was over, and the relations had departed, he lost no time in giving vent to the words which he had withheld from respect to the dead.

His interview with Henry was certainly not one which should have passed between any two brothers who had just been united in a common grief.

They were alone in the library on the morning after the funeral. Sir Richard had asked for a few words with his younger brother, and it was quite clear from the outset that they were not to be pleasant ones.

"I should like to have a little chat with you, Henry," he said coldly, as he lit a cigarette. "We may not meet again for some years, and I suppose you are leaving by the midday train."

Henry had not thought of leaving by the midday train, but he took the hint.

"Yes, I believe that is the only good train," he replied.

"I shall instruct my solicitor to pay off that mortgage as soon as possible."

"Yes, if you would. One can't afford to lock up twenty thousand pounds at four per cent. nowadays."

"Very well, that matter is settled. I am obliged to you for the loan. Well, Henry, I hope you are satisfied with your work, though I imagine that you cannot have expected such a complete disaster—such an absolute break-up of everything."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know well enough what I mean," Sir Richard replied savagely. "I have held my tongue till now out of respect for the dead, but now I intend to speak plainly. You are responsible for my mother's death, and you know it. She was ill, and you went to her with some trumped-up scandal about me and Betty. I don't know what poisonous lies you told her; I suppose I never shall know. But I have not the slightest doubt that you killed her, and I hope you are satisfied with your handiwork."

"How dare you!" cried Henry Gaunt, exasperated beyond all control. "How dare you talk to me like this—at such a time!"

"I dare anything. And I talk to you now because it is the last chance I shall get of talking to you. As long as I am alive you'll never set foot in this house again. Is that plain speaking enough for you?"

"It is not only plain, Dick," said Henry, with some dignity, "but it is exceedingly vulgar. I will not prolong this painful and very unseemly interview."

He walked to the door, and, opening it, looked back at his brother, who was still glaring at him like a wild beast.

"Good-bye, Dick," he said smoothly. "One of these days you will see what a fool you are making of yourself."

With this parting shot he closed the door, and Sir Richard Gaunt was left alone.

For a few moments he scowled angrily at the door, then he flung himself into a chair and lit a cigar. One interview was over, but there was another yet to come, and it

was possible that, though it might not prove as unpleasant, it would be far more difficult.

After ten minutes' deliberation he rang the bell.

"Please ask Lady Betty if she can spare me a few moments," he said to the servant. "Say that I wish to see her on important business."

The servant departed, and a few minutes afterwards Lady Betty Drake entered the room. She was dressed in black, and her face was very pale. She had scarcely been outside the house since the death of Lady Gwendolen, and the want of fresh air had worked a change in her healthy appearance.

Sir Richard Gaunt rose to his feet as she entered, and threw his cigar into the fire.

"Please sit down, Bet," he said gently; "I want to have a few words with you. I will not keep you more than a minute or two."

She did not answer him, but seated herself in an arm-chair before the fire. He stood on the hearthrug facing her, and clasped his hands behind his back.

"Are you leaving here to-day, Bet?" he asked, after an awkward pause.

"Yes, Dick," she replied in a low voice, "by the mid-day train."

"Henry is leaving by that train. He will be able to look after you."

"Henry?" she queried. "He told me he was staying on for a day or two. He said he thought of looking at a gold mine in the neighbourhood."

Sir Richard Gaunt laughed.

"How like Henry!" he said cheerfully. "Well, you can take it from me, Bet, that he's not staying on here, and I rather fancy he's going up by the twelve-fifty. But I didn't ask you in here to talk about Henry. I want to make my peace with you, to apologize—I have behaved like a brute the last few days, but you must forgive me. I did

not wish to cut myself off from your society, but I had no desire to meet my brother, and I could not very well exclude him from my circle. So I thought it better to efface myself."

"Your brother, Dick—why, surely—at such a time——"

"Oh, yes, you'd think so, wouldn't you? But I and Henry are not on good terms—well, it doesn't matter about that, Bet. I wish you'd stay on here, and use this house as your own. I will go back to Town."

"No," she said earnestly. "No, you must not do that, Dick. You must stay here; it has done you so much good."

"Yet I shall leave soon. Do you think that I can live here alone? Not I! London is the place that calls me, Bet, and I cannot resist the call. I may as well leave here at once. You like the place. Why don't you live in it? You can pay me rent if you choose. You have your work here, among the poor, and all that sort of thing. They'll miss you, and you'll be sorry to leave. Why, you've been here since you were ten years old, Bet."

"Yes, I shall be sorry to leave," she said slowly, "very sorry to leave, Dick."

"Well, it isn't necessary. I don't want you to go, and it isn't really necessary. I want to go myself."

"No, you must stay, Dick."

"I shall not stay; why should I? My mother is dead, and I only stayed on here because I——" He paused. He could not frame the lie in appropriate words.

"You must stay for your own sake."

"Nonsense, Bet. Who cares what happens to me? So long as my mother was alive—and that reminds me, I want to thank you for keeping me here against my will. I hope you will try to forget what took place on Aran Cawddy. It was a brutal act of violence, a gross insult to a good and pure woman. I shall always remember it with shame. I want to ask for your forgiveness, Bet, before

you leave here. Try and look on it in the best light you can; try and find some excuse for my disgusting conduct. I can find none myself. It is possible we may not meet again and I don't want you to think ill of me all your life."

Lady Betty did not answer. There was no anger on her face, but she seemed to be struggling against an inclination to burst into tears. The man misinterpreted her silence.

"Don't be hard on me, Bet," he exclaimed, after a pause.

"I forgive you," she faltered. "I cannot forget, of course."

"Thank you," he replied simply. He had no particular desire to be forgiven, but it pleased him to assume the pose of a suppliant. And if in the future he wished to marry—well, it might be useful to be on good terms with Lady Betty. For the present he had thrust all thoughts of matrimony out of his mind, and he was glad to think that the woman had declined his offer of marriage, made on the wild impulse of a momentary passion. He did not intend to renew the offer—for the present.

For a few moments there was a pause, and then Lady Betty rose to her feet.

"I must finish my packing," she said calmly. "Is this all you have to say to me?"

"Yes—that is to say, no, if I can persuade you to stay here, and let me leave you in possession of the place."

"I want you to stay here, Dick," she replied firmly. "You have made such a good start. It will be so much easier for you, if you stay here. You must promise me this, Dick, please."

She looked up into his face, and he turned his eyes away from her. He was a little ashamed of himself.

"Perhaps, Bet; but don't worry about me. I am not worth it."

She looked at his hard, evil face, and there was an expression in her eyes that he could not fathom. It was

almost too tender for pity, or sorrow, or disappointment. He shrank from it instinctively. It might be something more difficult to deal with than hatred.

"Yes, you are worth it," she said softly. "You have intellect and the power to do good. You must stay here."

She came closer and laid her hand on his arm.

"Not alone," he muttered, "it would be impossible alone."

"I will stay here too," she whispered.

"You!" he cried with a start. "Why, Bet, it would be—what would people say?"

Her cheeks grew red and she trembled with shame. But she was firm in her purpose. She would save this man at any cost.

"They would say nothing," she continued, "if we were married."

"Married?" he repeated—"married? Why, Bet, you told me—"

"Yes, but I have thought the matter over since then. I will marry you, Dick."

Gaunt was too dumbfounded to form a suitable reply. He was caught in a trap from which he could not escape with honour. He had asked her, in a moment of passion, to be his wife. He could not tell her that he had altered his mind. Yet he knew that he must speak at once. He realized all that the occasion demanded of him.

"It would be wicked," he stammered. "It would be too great a sacrifice. You are saying this out of pity, Bet. You do not love me. You said you didn't love me. I cannot accept such a sacrifice. I am not fit—no, Bet, it is sweet and good of you, but I should be a brute to take advantage of your kindness. For it is only kindness; it is not love."

"Then you did not mean what you said on Aran Cawddy?"

"Yes, yes," he replied hastily, "of course I meant it,

but I should never have said it. I cannot accept your sacrifice. You do not know all that has happened in the past."

"I do not want to know. If you will stay here for a year, and lead the life of a good man, I will marry you at the end of the year."

The man looked around him like a hunted animal. He was too great a coward to speak the truth. Was there no way of escape? Could he not still preserve his freedom and some shred of honour? Then he saw that there was only one way of retreat.

"If I marry," he said softly, "I shall marry a woman who loves me."

He looked at her tenderly. He knew that he had chosen a safe and open road.

"I do love you," she replied in a whisper. "Yes, Dick, I do love you, in spite of everything."

For a moment there was a look of fear on his face, but the woman did not see it, for her head was bowed in shame. She had lied, or she thought that she had lied, for she did not know that no woman will sacrifice herself for a man unless she loves him.

Then he made the best of matters, and did the only thing possible. He caught her in his arms, kissed her passionately, and whispered words of love.

IX

THE FURIES

THREE months passed, and Sir Richard Gaunt was still at Gaunt Royal.

His engagement to Lady Betty Drake had not yet been announced to the world. At her own suggestion it was not to be published till he had served six months of what he called his "imprisonment," and he was only too glad to fall in with the suggestion.

It is characteristic of men like Sir Richard that, however callous and shameless they may be in their dealings with women in a lower station, they draw the line at any act of open treachery towards a woman of their own class. This kind of honour belongs rather to a social than a moral code; but whatever the motive from which it springs, it is very real and binding.

Every hour that Sir Richard passed in his Welsh home was a period of unmitigated dullness. Days and nights were equally dreary and uninteresting.

But, in spite of his unquenchable dislike of country life, he endeavoured to keep his word to Lady Betty. When they parted on the morning of their betrothal, she had asked him to stay at Gaunt Royal till he had served his year of probation. In the excitement of the moment, and the hot passion which her beauty and love had stirred in his heart, he had promised to do this. Other men lived in the country, and could not be persuaded to leave it. He thought it just possible that he might get used to the life, and become a sporting squire.

He was soon undeceived. There was but little game to shoot, and his efforts with the gun were ludicrously unsuc-

cessful. As a boy he had promised to become a good shot, but years of excess had affected his nerve and eyesight, and he made himself as ridiculous as any Cockney sportsman out for a holiday. He could not face ridicule, and one day, after missing an easy shot with both barrels, he flung his gun over the edge of the cliff into the sea.

He was an equal failure on horseback. He did not care for jogging along the roads, and his first day with the hounds showed him that another attempt might cost him his life. The steep hills, strewn with stones, the precipices which often checked a man in the full swing of a sharp run, were not suitable country for any one who had lost his nerve.

He then bought a motor-car, but here again he paid the penalty of long years of vice. That nerve which is required in almost every form of outdoor sport was again wanting. The swift turn of a corner, the long sweep down an incline, sickened him. He could have gone slowly, but that touched the other extreme, and was mere weariness. For a man in his frame of mind and body there was no mean. His brain wanted excitement, but his body was not equal to the strain of bearing it.

And so, in turn, all physical amusements failed. He learnt to loathe all the beauties of Nature, and the scenery, unsurpassed even in the grandest district of Wales, positively irritated him. He hated the fine display of woodland and mountain range. The dark cliffs and the grey sea, though more acceptable, inasmuch as they did not seem so like a prison wall, were a poor substitute for the noise and glare of a city. The whole scheme of Nature jarred on his mind, and by degrees he began to spend much of his time indoors, and was driven back on the resources of his mind.

These, as may be imagined, were not vast. He had no love for books, and was incapable of interesting himself in

music or art. He finally, after a struggle to master a heap of novels from Mudie's, relapsed into a phase of absolute idleness, and spent most of the day musing by the fireside, with a pipe in his mouth and a brandy and soda by his side.

And then came the new devil which was to take the place of the one which Lady Betty had striven to exorcise. A vicious mind, deprived of one form of vice, is a field ripe for the acceptance of another. Sir Richard Gaunt had much to think about, and plenty of time for thought. Unfortunately, his thoughts were of that nature which require solace and sometimes demand oblivion. Both solace and oblivion were to be found in alcohol, and he saw that it was plainly destined to be a true friend through all the dreary months to come.

Sir Richard had for several years drunk more than was good for him, but he had never done so with any more definite object in view than that of reviving his wasted physical energies. Now, however, he began to drink steadily from morning to night. The effect of this was not gaiety nor even cheerfulness, but in the early parts of the day he experienced a certain contempt for every form of annoyance, and later on he relapsed into a dull stupor, in which the brain was practically asleep.

It was only in the early mornings that he was able to consider things clearly, and he gradually began to dread these brief glimpses of the realities of life. He did not suffer from the conventional headache or any of the physical discomforts which follow on a night's debauch. His body, it is true, was devoid of all energy, but his mind was active enough, and its activity was so painful to him that he endeavoured to subdue it at the earliest opportunity. There was often a brandy and soda on his dressing-table.

During these brief periods of lucidity he was troubled by two matters, each of them at first distinct, but likely

to become fused together owing to the way in which they alternated in his brain. The first was his marriage with Lady Betty.

He had no definite views on this, except that it must not take place at the end of the year, and that he must find some way of regaining his freedom before the engagement became public property. How this was to be done without losing hold on Lady Betty presented a very pretty problem. He did not wish to get rid of her altogether, as he might want to marry her later on, say, in two years' time, when he would probably be once more in financial difficulties.

He was much hampered by his ignorance of the true state of Lady Betty's feelings towards him. He could not make up his mind whether she really loved him, or whether she was merely sacrificing herself to save him from destruction. If he could have arrived at the truth, he would have known better how to act. If she really loved him, she would wait for him, and give him another chance to reform. But if, on the other hand, she was merely performing an act of charity, she might lose heart at her failure, and have nothing more to do with him. It was the thought of this latter contingency that had helped him to keep his promise, and had strengthened his resolution to remain at Gaunt Royal.

It was quite clear, however, that things could not continue in their present state. He had sense enough to see that he was drinking himself to death, and he realized that so long as he remained without amusement or occupation of any kind, so long would he have to drink in mere self-defence. He had no wish to die in such a thoroughly unsatisfactory fashion. He did not mind dropping of sheer exhaustion after wild years of passionate excess. But to be punished for what, after all, supplied him with only a negative form of pleasure, was intolerable. It was clear that he must leave Gaunt Royal, and break his promise,

but it was not yet clear how he could do it and still retain a hold on Lady Betty Drake.

The other matter which occupied his thoughts was less practical, and at first little more than a phantom of his own brain, but by degrees it assumed the proportions of a real and substantial factor in all his plans for the future. It was the oath which he had sworn to George Crawshay.

At first he had dismissed the whole subject from his mind, and his only feelings had been those of relief and satisfaction. The very nature of the oath had seemed to render the fulfilment of it impossible.

And then had come the swift illumination, sent to him at the bedside of his dead mother. He had seen, as in a flash of lightning, a brief glimpse of his own dark sin, and he had realized that it was yet possible to keep the oath, and that the absurdity of it was more apparent than real. What was there to prevent a man ruining his own life, and then putting an end to himself? It was a common enough occurrence in every-day life. And though it was always done without any motive, there was no reason why it should not be done with a very definite motive. It was certainly not an impossibility.

This germ of thought, sown in a sudden moment of grief, had expanded itself in the dreary weeks spent at Gaunt Royal. The dull, close atmosphere in which he lived was suitable for the growth of morbid ideas. His drink-sodden brain was in a fit state to conceive the most fantastic forms of thought. With nothing to occupy his mind, he allowed himself to dwell on this unholy subject, and find arguments both for and against the keeping of his oath. And the more he thought about it, the more terrible and real seemed the necessity to do something to carry out the bargain which he had sealed by words as solemn as had ever come from the lips of man.

Again and again he recalled George Crawshay's death,

and the horror of that last grim scene in the prison hospital so stamped itself on his brain that he could picture every detail of it. Again and again he recalled his own words:

“May the dead rise up against me and destroy me if I do not keep my oath.”

He had fulfilled part of his bargain. He had found the man, but the man was still alive. It was clear that absolution would only come with his own death.

More than once he wondered if he were not already undergoing the punishment he had called down upon his own head. Was he not suffering the torments of a hell on earth, was not his very life in itself working out a fulfilment of the oath, but working it out against his will? If that were the case, would it not be better to do the business thoroughly, to ruin himself body and soul, with a definite purpose? Perhaps by doing that he would make his peace with the dead.

So his thoughts, wild and uncertain, tried to grapple with a problem that was almost beyond the powers of a clear-headed philosopher. They wandered, now feebly, now with a swift tumultuous rush, down many paths, but they always returned to one dark certain place, and that was the House of Fear.

Sir Richard Gaunt was afraid, and therein lay the terror of the whole thing. He did not know what he feared—nothing human, nothing definite, not even the God Whom he had defied and blasphemed from his youth.

One morning, four months after his mother's death, he was shaving himself with a hand that was remarkably steady for a man who had been drunk the night before. When he had half completed his task, he paused with the razor laid flat against the side of his throat and a look of fear in his eyes.

He was seized with a sudden and almost irresistible desire to cut his own throat. He had no wish to take his

life, but he longed to turn the razor on its edge and draw it fiercely across the flesh. He even pictured what he would see in the glass after he had done it. The wish seemed to come from without, and not from within. It was almost as though some one had laid a hand on his wrist and had hypnotized his will. Men have been known to experience something of the same feeling when they have stood on the edge of a platform, and have felt a longing to throw themselves in front of an advancing train. They have no desire for self-destruction, but merely a desire to do the act which means self-destruction. Sir Richard Gaunt was for a moment oblivious of everything except the reflection of his own throat, half covered with lather, and an intense desire to slash the razor across it with all his strength.

Then suddenly the razor dropped from his nerveless fingers and clattered on the dressing-table. The noise broke the spell, and he stepped back and leant against the bed, white-faced, and trembling in every limb. The desire had passed, but the horror of it remained. He looked round the room as though expecting to see some one. Then he rang the bell.

"Finish shaving me, Hinton," he said, as the valet entered. "My hand is shaky."

The well-trained servant betrayed no surprise, but completed the task with swift dexterity.

"You can shave me every morning, Hinton," he said, when the man had sponged his face and removed the towel from his neck; "and take the razors away with you now. Then bring me up a brandy and soda."

The man obeyed the orders without asking any questions, and Sir Richard Gaunt sat down in an arm-chair and swallowed half his drink in a single gulp.

He resolved never to shave himself again. Perhaps the dead had already risen to destroy him—by his own hand.

"I must get out of this," he muttered to himself. "It

won't do. It can't go on. I must get out of it. I shall go mad."

But he still lingered on, trying to solve the two problems which had presented themselves to his mind, and sinking still lower into the depths.

X

THE ROOM OF FEAR

SIR RICHARD GAUNT was accustomed to spend his evenings in the library, which he had managed to turn into a fairly comfortable room by despoiling the other apartments of their best furniture. The time which elapsed between dinner and bed was the happiest part of his dreary day. His troubles were forgotten in the drowsy stupor which clouded his brain, and, ensconced full length on a huge Chesterfield divan, he smoked and drank until his eyes closed in sleep.

It was one of Hinton's duties to enter the library at eleven o'clock, wake his master from his drunken sleep, and see him safely upstairs into his bedroom.

On this particular night, however, Hinton had obtained leave of absence to visit a dying father, and the duty was relegated to the butler, who received minute instructions as to the proper way of carrying out what sometimes proved to be a difficult task.

Unfortunately the butler was accustomed to spend his evenings in very much the same way as his master, and was also accustomed to go to bed at ten o'clock, when all the other servants retired for the night; and the extra hour proved too much for him. He spent it in drinking still more whisky, and when eleven o'clock came he was sound asleep in the big easy chair which stood before the fire in the servants' hall.

And so it came to pass that when the clock struck eleven Sir Richard Gaunt still slept peacefully in the library.

Hour after hour passed, and the fire sank to a heap of grey ashes, and the candles guttered in their sockets, and still Sir Richard Gaunt slept. Then at last the candles

went out one by one and the room was in darkness, and there was no sound but the ticking of a clock and the heavy breathing of the drunken man.

Then the moon rose above the hills, and the blinds of the windows resolved themselves into white squares, crossed with dark black lines, and the things in the room itself became dimly visible. And a shaft of white light stole through a space between blind and wall, and fell upon a box thrust carelessly in a corner.

And still Sir Richard Gaunt slept, but he stirred uneasily in his sleep.

A few minutes later Sir Richard Gaunt turned over on his side, shivered, stretched out his arms, and opened his eyes. At first he was barely conscious of being in a strange sleeping-place. The fumes of alcohol, which a good night's rest generally dispersed, were still strong enough to slightly cloud his perception. He was comfortable, but he felt cold.

Then by degrees he began to understand that he was not in his bedroom, and he wondered what had happened to him. He raised himself up on one elbow and stared at the white shaft of moonlight which pierced the dim uncertainty of the room like a sword. His eyes followed it to its final resting-place in the corner of the room. The polished surface of the oaken box glittered like a pool of ink.

Then he realized where he was, and gradually, as his senses grew clearer, he understood what had happened. The butler had forgotten to wake him, and he was still in the library.

He did not move. His eyes were riveted on the box, and the sight of it, standing out there in vivid contrast to the rest of the room, brought back that sense of fear which he could only dispel by the aid of brandy. He felt that there was some one with him in the room, some one who wished to injure him, and he was afraid.

He listened attentively, as though he expected to hear footsteps, or some movement, or even the sound of a voice. But he could hear nothing save the ticking of a clock and the rapid beating of his own heart.

His first impulse was to rise and make his way up to his bedroom, to strike a light, and get out of the room as soon as possible. But he waited, as though he expected something to happen, and as if the sofa was a safe island of refuge among dangers which he could not define, but which certainly lurked somewhere in the gloom.

And then the thoughts which as a rule only troubled him in the early morning returned to him with pitiless clearness, and were rendered more terrible by the darkness and that white finger of light which pointed at the story of Crawshay's search.

Once more he realized to the full the horror of Crawshay's death, once more he remembered the words of the oath which he had sworn, once more he recollected the judgment he had called down on his own head if he failed to keep his word.

And then again there came the memory of that morning when he had stood before the looking-glass with a razor at his throat, and had felt an irresistible desire to cut a thin red line from ear to ear; and, as he recalled it, he also remembered that there was a loaded revolver in one of the drawers of his writing-table.

Moved by some power over which he had no control, he rose to his feet and groped his way to the table. He thought that the grip of his fingers on the revolver would inspire him with courage. He was certain some unauthorized person was either in the room or moving about the house. He could hear nothing, but he seemed to feel their presence. It would be wise to arm himself in case of accidents.

He fumbled with his keys, and, after several attempts, opened the drawer, and took the revolver in his hand. For

a moment the feel of the weapon seemed to fascinate him. Then he slipped it into his pocket, and once more his eyes fell on the box in the corner. He walked over to it and moved it out of the ray of moonlight into the darkness.

Then he returned to the windows, and lifting aside one of the blinds stared out across a thick bank of shrubs at the moonlit sea. As he did so, he fancied he heard a noise, but he could see nothing, and he turned away and struck a match. He looked round the room in vain for a candle; they had all burnt down to their sockets, and he allowed the match to go out.

He resolved to grope his way upstairs in the dark, if he could not find a candle in the hall. He took a final look round the room, and then his eyes were arrested by a sight which held him motionless.

Another ray of light had pierced the darkness, and the box once more stood out clear and distinct, as though illuminated by a searchlight.

He stood there for a moment paralyzed with fear. The ray might almost have been the accusing finger of God. As a matter of fact, nothing supernatural had happened. When he had looked out of the window, he had left a chink between the blind and the wall, and, of course, he had not noticed the ray of light in the yellow flare of the match. It was a mere chance that the light fell on the place to which he had moved the box.

But to Sir Richard Gaunt, whose nerves were already wrought upon by long months of fear, it was no chance. He had not the presence of mind to look for the material cause of the sudden and striking effect. He only saw in it a manifestation of some unseen power, which was determined to thrust the box under his notice at a time when he did not wish to see it.

For more than three minutes he stood almost as motionless as though he had lost the use of his limbs, and in those three minutes his brain seemed to be more active than he

had ever known it, even in the days when it had not been dulled by drink and excess. His whole life seemed to flash up before him in a swift panorama, in which scene followed scene with such incredible rapidity that they became a confused blur of sound and colour. Only two periods stood out with startling vividness. The one in which he had known Violet Hexamer, and the other in which he had known George Crawshay.

"May the dead rise up against me and destroy me if I do not keep my oath."

He muttered the words mechanically, like some child learning a phrase by heart.

And then at last he moved. His right hand stole into his pocket, and he pulled out the revolver. It felt cold and heavy in his hand.

"You must hunt down the man, and when you find him you must hound him to ruin and death."

He did not speak the words himself, but he heard them as plainly as though they had been spoken in the room. He could distinguish the curious intonation of George Crawshay's voice. He answered them, not in his mind, but in actual spoken words, as though there were some one there to listen to him.

"I will hound the man to ruin and death. I will keep my oath."

And as he spoke the words, he saw the thing that he must do. He must plunge once more into the old life of pleasure, and wreck both his body and mind. And then—he would die, by his own hand. It would not be hard to die when he had exhausted all that made life worth living. He would have his fling first, and then slip quietly out of the world.

"Good, Crawshay, good," he cried. "I will keep my oath to you. I will ruin the man, and I will kill him. But the man's got to have his fling first. He's got——"

He paused, and the mad words died into silence. Some-

thing had happened, but what? For the moment he could not tell. But something had stifled his voice and taken away from him the power of speech. Something had gripped his mind, his hand, his whole being. He saw himself as though he were looking at another man. He saw his right arm move slowly forward and upward, and then his forearm bend back till the revolver was close to his forehead.

And then came a wild, unreasoning desire to press the finger on the trigger. It was no desire to commit suicide. It was merely an intense longing to see the effect. It almost amounted to curiosity; there would be a report, a spurt of flame, some smoke, but after that—well, it would be easy to see what came after that.

And then suddenly a great fear overcame everything.

“No, no, Crawshay!” he screamed. “Not yet! No, I tell you! I will have my fling first.”

His piercing, agonized cry rang through the house. There was a sound of footsteps outside, the hurried opening of a door, another scream from Sir Richard, who was struggling as if in the grip of a python.

Then there was a report, a crash on the floor, and then silence. Sir Richard Gaunt had fainted, and this alone had saved his life. He pulled the trigger as he fell, and the bullet buried itself in the wall.

When Lady Betty Drake left Gaunt Royal she stayed with some friends in Warwickshire for a fortnight. Then she paid a visit to some distant relations in London, and finally took a small furnished house in Mayfair.

It was, of course, impossible for her to live alone; she was not a young girl, but she was young enough to provide food for scandal. She wrote to a certain Mrs. Prideaux, the widow of a very distinguished officer, and asked her to share her home with her. This lady, who was sixty years of age, and in receipt of a small pension, used to stay at

Gaunt Royal three weeks in every year, and Lady Betty had conceived a strong liking for her. The offer was gratefully accepted, and Lady Betty made it clear from the outset that she was receiving, and not bestowing a favour.

It was the height of the London season when these two took up their residence in their new home. Lady Betty's rank and fortune would have assured her a welcome in the best houses in Town, but she was in deep mourning, and refused all invitations to the various wearisome entertainments with which society burdens itself. She received callers, and returned calls, for she was not superior to the ordinary civilities of life; but she declined to do more than this, and was glad that she had a good and reasonable excuse for her conduct.

She was, however, not a woman to let time lie heavy on her hands. She made up her mind to devote herself to some work which would help others in less fortunate circumstances than herself, and one has not to look far for such work in London.

Lady Betty dispensed her charity on novel lines. She gave freely, in fact, on a gigantic scale, but she never gave anything herself. The money all went into properly organized channels, and if she required help for any particular person, she let it come to that person from another source. "I will speak to So-and-So about you," was her invariable reply to any request for help.

Now this in itself is not uncommon, but this was only part of her work. She personally laboured amongst the poorest and most degraded of the English race. Plainly and almost shabbily dressed, she was among them as a friend, as one who was not separated from their sorrows and difficulties by the insurmountable wall of high social station.

And, in spite of all the work that she had set herself to do, Sir Richard occupied a large share of her thoughts. This was only natural, as she had promised to marry him.

Why had she promised to marry Sir Richard Gaunt? At first she found many answers to this question, but none of them satisfactory. She had done it for the sake of his dead mother, for the remembrance of the past, when they had been boy and girl together. But, as she thought over the matter, she realized that she had only done it for his own sake.

And the realization of this slowly and gradually led her to the truth. When three months had passed, and Sir Richard Gaunt was still sticking to his guns at Gaunt Royal, she began to think that she had some influence over him, and that he really loved her. And then at last she knew why she had made this sacrifice. She loved him, and that was the only reason she wished to save him.

Then one day, some five months after Lady Gwendolen's death, she received the following letter from him:

"DEAREST BETTY,—I have bad news for you this time, old girl. I've just seen the doctor, and he tells me I must have a change. My nerves seem to have gone somehow, and I feel regular down in the dumps. I suppose it's the dullness of this place. Anyway, I am not at all well. He thinks a voyage to Australia and back would set me up. I can tell you that I hate being here, and, but for you, I should have left long before this. May I go this voyage, Bet? I won't if you don't want me to. I thought I would write and ask you first. I have tried very hard to do what you want. But I'm dead beat. I don't know what will happen if I stay here any longer. I am really ill. You can ask Dr. Morgan if you like. He thinks that I must go. Please do not say no, but, if you do, I will abide by your decision. Please write on receipt of this, as I should like to arrange for next boat.—Your loving Dick.

"P. S.—I won't even go ashore if you'd rather I didn't."

For a whole hour Lady Betty sat with the letter in her hand, and read it again and again. Then she went out to the post office and sent off the following reply:—

"So sorry to hear of illness. Go by all means. I can trust you. Come to see me before you go.—BETTY."

XI

THE WRECK OF THE *SANTIGAN*

A FAINT grey mist lay on the river, as the *Santigan* left Tilbury Docks for her long journey to the other side of the world. But before she had passed the Chapman Light the sun came out overhead and the water of the wide estuary glowed softly in its radiance.

Sir Richard Gaunt leant over the port rail of the upper deck, and watched the land slip slowly past him. The flat marshes of Canvey Island were almost beautiful in the golden haze. The old church of Leigh stood out on the top of the hill like a sturdy sentinel. And then came the red blotch of a new brick town stretching along the shore, and the thin black thread of Southend Pier, and the hideous gasometer which dominates the whole coastline like a fortalice. Then Shoebury Point, and the smoke of guns booming across the Maplin Sands. And then the flat marsh receding northwards—a land of dreariness and desolation, Foulness Island, perhaps the most lonely spot in England.

And then at last to the north there was nothing but the open sea. On the starboard side of the vessel there were the pleasant shores of Kent, studded with successful watering places. But Richard Gaunt still kept his eyes to the north, and over the waste of waters he seemed to see the tall black cliffs of Cardiganshire, and the ugly white front of Gaunt Royal, and the stupendous slopes of the bare mountain range beyond.

And, as he thought of them, he smiled. No bird escaped from its cage, no prisoner set free from gaol, could have felt more deeply grateful for freedom. The dreary

monotony of life at Gaunt Royal was over. Before him lay a voyage which might be full of incident. Behind him, nothing he was sorry to leave.

It was pleasant, moreover, to think that the whole thing had been managed without any difficulty, and without even the telling of a single lie. He had spoken the truth, when he said that his health had broken down and that he needed a change. The doctor had been emphatic in the matter. He had insisted on a change of life and on more temperate habits. He had been sent for when the butler found Sir Richard in the library with a smoking revolver in his hand. He had a shrewd suspicion that the unfortunate man had attempted his own life and had only been saved by a sudden attack of vertigo. It was clear that some change of life was required, and he advised a sea voyage.

Lady Betty had placed no difficulties in the way of the man she loved. His white face and trembling hands had pleaded for him. It was clearly a case of a nervous breakdown, and he had attributed it to his lonely life at Gaunt Royal. It had been arranged between them that he should take a sea voyage to Sydney and back on the *Santigan*, and that, when he returned, their engagement should be announced to the world.

His departure from Gaunt Royal had, for the present, at any rate, removed the shadow of George Crawshay from his mind. Before he left, he destroyed the box and its contents. In a vague sort of way he had determined to keep his oath. He would ruin his own life, but in the pleasantest fashion possible, and then, at some very distant date, he would kill himself, but he would not do this until life had become unbearable. In this simple manner, he would fulfil his bargain, and get all the pleasure he could out of existence.

But he did not think of Crawshay, as he looked out across the grey expanse of sea and felt the cool salt breeze

against his face. Already he felt new life in his veins, and he looked forward to the voyage. There would be a fresh world to conquer on this ship, with its new life and unfamiliar scenes. His name and title, which were none too sweet in London, might acquire a veritable fragrance in a mixed colony of passengers.

He slept well that first night. He was tired out, and glad to get to bed early. Remembering the doctor's advice, he cut down the number of his drinks, and he found it by no means hard to do this in his new surroundings. There was no longer any necessity for him to look for solace or oblivion. And he could find excitement in a pleasanter form.

The next morning he woke up feeling all the better for his few hours on the ship, and life seemed very pleasant, as he walked up and down the deck and saw the sunlight on the smooth waters of the Channel and took stock of the passengers.

Some of the people were already beginning to make those friendships which last for such a short time, but which are so delightful while they last; and Richard Gaunt's keen eyes were not idle. The voyage, of course, would be intolerable without a love affair. Hitherto he had had no experience of life on a liner, but he had heard from his friends that there was a good deal of fun to be got out of it.

Before another day had come to a close, he had marked out his prey, and had commenced the chase with a few commonplace remarks on the delightful smoothness of the water. She was a pretty, fair-haired girl, and was travelling with a father who was taking the voyage for his health. The father dozed most of the day in a deck-chair, and the girl, a lively, middle-class young person of nineteen, was only too pleased to embark on an innocent flirtation.

Richard Gaunt was a master of most of the arts that

are required to conquer a woman's heart. He was handsome, and though his face bore the marks of dissipation, it was merely pale and interesting to a young girl unversed in the wickedness of the world. In the early stages of their intercourse he had hinted at a secret trouble, at the hollowness of earthly happiness, and the pretty, silly fish had risen to the bait. Richard Gaunt knew well enough how to capture the attention of a young girl whose life had been spent in the unromantic propriety of Balham.

And so the acquaintance rapidly ripened to friendship, and, before the *Santigan* had passed the Rock of Gibraltar, Richard Gaunt had held the girl in his arms and kissed her. In his opinion, the act required no explanations. He did not tell her that he loved her, and certainly did not express any desire to marry her. He was content to let the action sink into her mind and leave her to draw her own conclusions. And she, poor weak fool, found sufficient glory in the kiss, and did not ask what lay beyond. If matters advanced no further, she could always comfort herself with the thought that she had been kissed by Sir Richard Gaunt, of Gaunt Royal.

But it was not the man's custom to allow matters to come to a standstill, and by the time the vessel reached the Suez Canal, he had told her of a secret and degrading marriage with one of the parlour-maids at Gaunt Royal, and that his wife was in a madhouse, and as many other lies as he could plausibly piece together. He made it clear to the girl that he at last knew the true meaning of love, and that, although he was bound and fettered in a prison from which he could not escape, yet his whole body and soul longed for the only woman he had ever loved.

But young ladies brought up in the domestic and virtuous homes of Balham are not so simple-minded as Gaunt imagined. Isabel Dickinson knew that the man was lying

to her, and after a short pause, in which she tried to remember the conduct proper to such occasions, she rose to her feet and left him without another word.

And then for another twenty-four hours the girl did not stir from her cabin, and most of the time she lay in her bunk crying softly to herself. For she knew at last that she loved this man, and that it did not much matter to her if he were a baronet or a bootblack. She realized that it would be impossible to keep away from him until the end of the voyage. If she had been on land, she would have fled from the danger that confronted her. But here there was no escape. Every day she would have to see him and hear the sound of his voice. She was afraid, and trembled at the thought of his presence. Yet she longed for the touch of his hand, for his kisses, for the prison of his strong arms. She was no longer the daughter of a tradesman scheming for a title and a historic home in Wales, but a woman who was capable of sacrificing herself on the burning altar of love.

The next day she appeared at breakfast, and became the centre of a sympathizing group of women, who inquired maliciously after her health, knowing well enough that her indisposition was due to no bodily ailment. She was courteously rude to all of them, and before lunch she was sitting in a deck-chair by the side of Sir Richard Gaunt, who was whispering passionate apologies in her ear.

The end of this sordid and pitiful romance was not far to seek. Sir Richard Gaunt was a man who had hardly ever failed to score in the game of love. If his talent for stratagem and quiet persistence had been diverted into worthier channels, he would have won a high place in the diplomatic world. He pursued his prey with the relentless tenacity of a hunter, who knows that success depends on careful attention to the minutest details.

And the end came one dark, still night, as the *Santigan*

slipped smoothly through the Red Sea and left a wake of white foam behind her.

The two were sitting together in a sheltered corner near the stern of the vessel. It was after ten o'clock and a dark night. Not a star was visible overhead, for a thick fog had risen up from the water and it was impossible to see a hundred yards in any direction. A dance was in progress, and most of the passengers were below, for it was not a night to linger on deck.

And then he pleaded to her, and she listened to the burning words as they came from his lips, and she did not shrink from him as he held her in his arms and covered her face with passionate kisses. All power of resistance had gone from her. Gaunt already saw victory within his grasp.

But God had decreed otherwise. The man's voice had died away into silence, and he waited for the answer to his pleading. But, before the words that would have sealed her fate could rise to her trembling lips there came a sharp order from the bridge of the great ship, and then, far below in the engine-room, the faint clang of a bell. At the same time a fiery-red eye glowed out of the mist on the starboard bow.

Then Gaunt heard the shouts of men, and, leaning over the side of the vessel, he saw something small and dark ahead of them. Then he discerned the masthead lights of a little steamer and her green starboard light as she altered her course. She looked like a mere toy-boat beside the great bulk of the liner.

"We shall smash them to splinters!" he cried. The girl clung to his arm and peered over the rail. There was another ring down in the engine-room, and the liner again altered her course.

But she turned slowly, and, as she did so, the captain of the other vessel lost his head, and made an error of judgment which cost him his own life and resulted in one

of the most appalling catastrophies that have ever been known in the history of the sea. He saw that the long and unwieldy liner was turning but slowly, and, trusting in the speed and nimbleness of his own little craft, he tried to pass her on her starboard side. But he had either miscalculated the distance or else the speed of the *Santigan*.

"We've done it," said Gaunt. "We'll ride over her and not feel it. Poor devils!"

Then there was a faint shock as the vessels touched, and a second later sea and sky were welded in a blaze of blinding light. Gaunt and his companion were flung twenty feet across the deck, and there was a roar that seemed to beat out all life and feeling.

It was only a small steamer that the *Santigan* had crushed. But part of her cargo was fulminate of mercury, and sixty feet of the *Santigan's* bows had been ripped off her as though the steel plates were paper and the iron frame a piece of basket-work.

For a moment there was a continuous splash and rattle, while the heavens rained wood and iron and human flesh upon the deck and the surface of the waters. Then there was a silence for a few seconds. Half the people in the ship had been killed or stunned by the explosion. The rest had been dashed from wall to wall, and were dazed and helpless. The few passengers on the after-part of the deck had escaped with little injury beyond the shock and a few bruises. Gaunt and Miss Dickinson, mercifully flung under the shelter of a huge ventilating shaft, had been protected from the rain of shattered wood and twisted iron.

Gaunt staggered to his feet, and felt the slope of the deck, and heard the shrieks of women and the shouts of men. He did not know what had happened, but he knew that death was near to him. The whole scene was in total darkness, for the explosion had extinguished every light on the ship. He was no coward, but the situation

was terrible enough to appal the bravest. Only one thing was certain. The ship was going down. The deck was almost at an angle of forty-five degrees, and he could scarcely keep his foothold.

Then he thought of the woman, and, seizing her by the arm, he dragged her to her feet and pulled her towards the rail of the deck. She, poor soul, flung suddenly from the heights of passion into the horrors of death, was unable to think or act for herself.

Far below them, as though rising from a dark pit, they heard the screams and yells of the passengers, and then the deafening hiss of steam. Gaunt found the rail, groped along it till he came to two lifebelts. He thrust one over the girl's shoulders and hung the other on his arm.

"It's all right," he shouted, "if you'll only keep cool. Come with me and hold on to my arm."

He crept forward down the hill of the deck, and did not pause till the water touched his feet; then he lifted the girl on to the rail and climbed up to her side.

"Jump!" he said quickly, "the water's close to you. It's our only chance."

They jumped together, hand in hand, and directly they rose to the surface, Gaunt, who was a good swimmer, struck out with all his strength and pulled the girl after him.

Before they had gone fifty yards the *Santigan* had slipped down into a thousand fathoms of water and had been blotted out like a stone flung into a pool. A few specks of humanity struggling for life on an ocean infested with sharks represented all the crowd of laughing and flirting passengers who had been dancing at the ball. Only three minutes had elapsed between the collision and the disappearance of the shattered hull.

As the great ship sank with a final roar of steam, Gaunt and his companion were drawn under the water. But they were too far from the vortex to be sucked down with the sinking hull. Buoyed up by their life-belts, they rose

quickly to the surface. Gaunt still held on to the girl, and all the time he kicked and splashed the water. He knew that at any moment the sharks might be fighting over the fragments of their limbs and bodies.

Then his hand struck something hard in the darkness, and clutched it and found that it was wood, jagged and splintered on the edges. And, feeling his way along it, he discovered that it was a large piece of planking, torn from the bows of the liner or else from the deck of the small steamer. He let go of the girl, and climbing up on to the wreckage found that it was large and would bear the weight of both of them. Then he helped her up to his side.

"That's good!" he cried gleefully; "we've cheated them."

"Cheated whom?" the girl asked.

"The shark devils," he answered. "They might have lopped off our legs at any minute. We must be careful, though—sit nearer the centre. 'Tis a cranky craft, and we shall have to keep it from turning over."

The piece of wreckage rocked as the girl shifted her position.

"That's better," said Gaunt cheerfully. "I dare say we'll be picked up at daylight. I wonder if they managed to launch a boat."

The girl did not answer, but she moaned piteously. Gaunt held her hand and tried to comfort her. But she only sobbed and cried until she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

But Gaunt kept watch, and stared into the darkness, waiting for the dawn, and wondering what the light of the sun would show on the face of the waters.

XII

THE HAND OF GOD

At last the dawn burst swiftly and suddenly in the east, and ten minutes after the first flush of light in the sky the whole scene stood out clearly in the sunshine.

The water, smooth as glass, was covered with small fragments of wreckage, but there was no sign of any boat or any human being.

Gaunt inspected the small raft on which he found himself. It was a piece of deck-planking, still adhering to two thick beams, which had been torn out of the framework of the vessel. The buoyancy of these heavy timbers raised the planking a few inches above the water, but the whole concern was scarcely safe even in a calm sea, and it would be certain to turn over if a wave struck it. He resolved to strengthen it, if possible, with some more timber.

He managed to break off a loose piece of planking, which served as a clumsy substitute for an oar, and, with the aid of this, he contrived to move the raft very slowly through the water. At the end of three hours' hard toil he had picked up several pieces of spar and cordage, and had lashed them to the edges of the raft. Although the work was done in a most unseamanlike fashion, yet the whole structure acquired stability from the extra pieces of timber, and it was possible to move about freely without fear of being thrown into the sea.

Then he proceeded to look for food and water, but he found neither; and before nightfall the girl, who had struggled bravely against the torments of thirst and hunger, lapsed into state of insensibility.

Soon after sunset a breeze sprang up, but even if Gaunt had been able to set a sail, it would have been of no use

to him. He did not know the lie of the nearest land. He was helpless on that smooth plain of water. He could only wait, and hope for the passing of some ship.

And then came the darkness and a night of terror. For the girl grew delirious and tried to fling herself into the sea. Hour after hour he clutched her tightly in his arms and listened to her ravings. He thought of the last occasion on which he had held her in his embrace, and perhaps the poor crazy woman was thinking of it too, for she shrieked of the judgment of God, and of the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and of sin, and of the wages of sin, which is death.

And then at last his own strength failed him, and he fainted, and when he came to his senses it was broad daylight, and he was alone.

He wondered whether she had thrown herself off the raft in her delirium, or whether she had recovered her senses and decided to die rather than endure another hour of torment. Her life-belt lay on the planking. He remembered that he had slipped it over her arms and shoulders in the first few minutes of her madness. But it might easily have fallen off by accident.

No vessel was in sight, and there was nothing to be seen but the broad expanse of ocean, scarred with small waves. For all Gaunt knew to the contrary, the raft had not moved from the scene of the wreck. He knew nothing of the strong, swift currents that convert every sea into a network of flowing streams.

He peered over the edge of the raft and saw two long shadowy forms moving in the depths of the clear green water. These were the silent watchers of the deep, waiting till the raft capsized on the crest of a wave or till the man threw himself overboard in his agony.

And, as he saw them, he set his teeth, and seizing a spare piece of lashing, he knotted it about his waist, so that he could not move a foot in any direction. What-

ever happened, he would die in the air and not in the water.

Then Richard Gaunt awaited the end that was not far off. And his past life rose up before him, as it rises up to the brain of a drowning man.

Once again two periods stood out with ghastly distinctness from all the tangled web of sin and shame. And once more he recalled the words of his oath, and laughed like a maniac as he mouthed them with his lips. The oath would be kept to the very letter. The man who ruined Violet Hexamer was going to die. George Crawshay himself could not have wished for a worse end to the life of his enemy. The man was going to die, cut off in the very midst of his sins, without a chance of repentance or atonement, and with the record of his life before his eyes. And in all that record, so replete with incident, he could barely recall a single event which a dying man would care to contemplate. It had been one lurid story of evil. The keynote had been pleasure, and the music, varied though it had been, had been played in that single key. To Richard Gaunt, weak, exhausted, and with a mind attuned to less earthly things, every melody was hideous and discordant.

Then, after an hour or two of thought, in which the tale of all his sins, and all the wrongs that he had done to others, rose up before him as clearly as though it had been written in letters of fire, he screamed aloud in his agony of body and mind, and fumbled at the knots about his waist.

"Yes, Crawshay," he cried, "I will keep my oath. Here is the life you asked for."

And then he mercifully lost his senses, and the moon shone down on his prostrate body, shifting to and fro on the boards as the waves ran under the raft and rocked it from side to side. But the stout rope held, and Sir Richard Gaunt was denied the quietude of death.

Once more he came to his senses, and as he stared up into the night, he tried to remember what had happened and where he was. And, as he recalled the horrors of the last two days, he clasped his hands and tried to pray. But religion had formed no part of Gaunt's life since his second and last year at a public school. He had been confirmed in that year, and six months afterwards he had been expelled from the school. He tried to remember some set form of prayer, and his mind went back to the days of his childhood when he had prayed at his mother's knee. But he could remember nothing, save that he had knelt on the floor and clasped his hands. Now he could not kneel, but he twined his fingers together.

"O Lord, have mercy upon me," he muttered; and then, "O Lord, have mercy upon my soul."

And then he babbled out a fragment of the Lord's Prayer.

And then he recalled a line of a hymn—

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes.

And then his lips moved rapidly, and incoherent words came from them, and the soul, which had so long refused the expression which the strong heart and body of a man could have given to it, now at last rose from its lethargy and found that the mind and voice were too weak to respond to its promptings.

And then in the silence and darkness of that eastern sea a great and a wonderful thing happened. It might have been described as a miracle, were it not that the term "miracle" is usually applied to some material and unnatural demonstration of the Divine power. Here nothing happened that a man could see or hear, and yet the thing that happened to Sir Richard Gaunt was truly as wonderful as the vision of any angel on the face of the waters.

The incoherence of his broken prayers suddenly ceased,

and, raising himself on one elbow, he stared out across the waters. He could see nothing, for though the moon was bright in the sky overhead, there was a mist before his eyes. But swiftly as a curtain is whipped aside, the cloud was drawn off his brain. The confused darkness of his thoughts gave place to a clear contemplation of the past and the death that was so near to him. He saw himself as he was, and as he might be, if God spared his life.

And, as he learnt the truth, he prayed, no longer in the frenzied prayers of a man who is clutching at the remnants of his religious faith, but with the clear, deep calm of one who prays for salvation, and knows that his prayer will reach the ears of God.

"Have mercy, O Lord!" he cried aloud. "Forget the past. Give me the future, and I will serve Thee to the end of my days."

He listened as though he expected an answer to come back to him out of the silence. But there was no sound save the splash of the waves as they ran past him into the path of moonlight.

And then he saw that even his prayer was vile in the sight of God. He had tried to buy his life by promising to turn from evil. He had almost held out a bribe to the Almighty. He shrank from the thought of the words he had used, and lay very still, with clasped hands and moving lips.

"Forgiveness," he muttered, after a long silence. "That is all I ask; forgiveness for my sins. Then let me die."

They were not the words of a hypocrite, trying to seek favour in the eyes of God. They were true words, spoken from the heart. Richard Gaunt had suddenly ceased to long for life. He saw clearly that he had deserved the sentence of death, and there was no longer any wish to struggle against his fate. He no longer feared the sea, or the madness or the slow torment of hunger

and thirst, or the things that watched in the water. He was content to die, and was not afraid of aught but the hereafter.

"Forgiveness is all I ask," he moaned, and listened for some answer to his prayer.

But there came no answer. The spiritual peace which might have come to the mind of a good man was denied him. Repentance, remorse, self-abasement, humility, all these were given to him. But there was no peace.

Then the darkness seemed to close in upon him like a wall, and he fancied that he was falling down into a bottomless gulf, and he heard the roar of a gigantic waterfall, that beat all thought, and prayer, and life into silence.

XIII

THE MAKING OF A MAN

THE next morning, a small sailing vessel, engaging in fishing and pearling off the coast of Arabia, sighted a black speck on the smooth surface of the waters, and, coming up to it, found the body of a man lashed to a small and rudely-constructed raft.

The man was apparently dead, and the fishermen, fierce, callous Orientals, were for casting him into the sea after they had appropriated his clothes, watch, and the few sovereigns that they found in his waistcoat pocket. But one of them, who was cunning rather than humane, suggested the possibility of a reward, and said that if Heaven thought fit to spare the stranger's life, it would be as well to participate in the benefits bestowed by a merciful Providence. These white infidels were rich and able to pay well for any services rendered to them.

So they took Richard Gaunt on board their dhow, and set sail for the coast, which was forty miles distant.

They used every means in their power to restore him to life, but it was not until they were within a mile of their destination that he opened his eyes and cried out for water.

A draught of strong, bitter wine put life into his wasted body, and he greedily devoured some dates that were offered him. Then he asked a few questions, but, finding that he was not understood, he relapsed into silence. The men jabbered away in an unknown tongue and made signs, which conveyed nothing to his mind. He made no effort to comprehend what they were saying. He had no wish to know who they were, or where they were taking

him to. For the time being the affairs of the world did not interest him. He could only think of his escape from death, and of that last agony in which he had prayed to God for life.

The vessel sailed down a narrow channed between two black walls of rock and anchored in a blue and sunlit pool. On either side of it were more rocks, so high that they overtopped the masts, but the shore itself was a stretch of smooth white sand. Two hundred yards inland there was a small oasis, covered with green herbage and date palms, but beyond that there was nothing but an undulating plain of sand, extending as far as the eye could reach. A few tents and huts were scattered about under the shade of the trees, and some children were playing on the sand and building castles, just for all the world like English children at Margate. Some women, closely veiled, came leisurely down to the edge of the water and stared at the vessel, as though they had not seen it before.

Richard Gaunt was rowed ashore in a flat-bottomed boat, and at once became the centre of a small crowd. The children left their little heaps of sand, and the women turned away from their contemplation of the vessel. But one of the men, who appeared to have some authority over the others, spoke a few sharp words, and the crowd dispersed. Two strong, swarthy fellows laid hold of Gaunt and carried him up the slope, for he was still too weak to walk. They took him to the door of a large hut, built of branches, and laid him on the threshold. Then one of them cried out something, and they both stood aside and waited.

In a few moments the door of the hut opened and an old man came out, and, supporting himself with the aid of two sticks, gazed fixedly at the prostrate figure. It seemed to Gaunt that this was the oldest man he had ever seen. The brown face was wrinkled like the shell

of a walnut. The body, once of more than average height, was so bowed by age that the long white beard fell below the knees. The hands were all veins and muscles, and looked almost like designs for an anatomical student. Only the eyes retained the vigour and sparkle of youth. They were dark, piercing, and full of life.

For more than a minute the little group remained motionless, then the old man asked a question and received a long and voluble reply. Then he pointed with a stick to a small hut, and hobbled back into his house.

The two men picked up Gaunt from the ground and carried him to the small hut that was destined to be his home for many months.

He was treated with every kindness until he had recovered his health and strength. Then it was made clear to him that he must either work or starve. He worked willingly, and the hard, simple life of a sailor began to make a man of him.

At first he was kept a close prisoner, and it was not until he had acquired something of the language spoken by his captors that he was able to satisfy them that he had no wish to escape.

The news was not altogether received with favour. The men had made up their minds that he would pay handsomely for his release, and, although they did not suggest a ransom, they hinted at a reward. When they learnt that he did not wish to return to his own country they scowled at him, and discussed the matter vehemently among themselves.

Then two of them gripped him by the arms and led him to the edge of a big rock, which rose sheer out of the sea.

"There is the water," one of them said; "what came out of the water shall return to it."

Gaunt did not understand all that was said, but the

meaning of their actions was plain enough. He neither struggled nor spoke. For a minute they held him over the edge of the cliff, and he looked at the ledge of rocks below. Beyond them the dim shadow of a great fish moved through the translucent water.

Then they grunted, and ran him inland till they had passed through the green oasis and stood on the border of the great desert.

"There is the desert," said one of them; "that which goes into the desert does not return."

Again he understood, though the words were not clear to him. He looked out across the waste of burning sand and smiled.

"Take me to your father," he said; and then, as they did not understand, he repeated the word "Father" and looked back towards the big hut.

And they took him back to the cool shade of the trees, and brought him into the presence of the bent and bowed old man, for he was the patriarch, the father of eight of them, and the father-in-law of the remaining three. In that little settlement 'twixt the desert and the sea he ruled supreme, in spite of his feeble limbs and his failing intellect. All the children that played under the trees and tumbled on the beach were his descendants.

"I want to stay here," said Gaunt quietly. "I do not wish to leave you. Make me one of your family."

The old man stared fixedly at him from under his shaggy white eyebrows. Gaunt's words were not clear, but the patriarch seemed to grasp their meaning. He was apparently considering whether this young man of an alien race would be a welcome addition to his little settlement. Fortunately for Gaunt his conduct had already earned the approval of this stern old chieftain. And the manner of his coming had not been without its effect on a superstitious mind.

"Let him stay," said the patriarch, after a long silence.

"God has sent him to us. When the time comes he will go."

And from that hour Richard Gaunt was made free of the community, and lived as one of the others, and no man followed him about to see if he would escape without payment for the services rendered to him. And as he grew more perfect in the language, and was able to understand and make himself understood, he learnt to like the rough, hard-hearted men who were his associates from dawn to sunset. They were stern and callous, like most Orientals, but they knew the dignity of labour, and there was nothing common or unclean in their midst.

After the life that Sir Richard Gaunt had lived in London this life was wonderful in its simplicity and its purity. In the old days he would have laughed at the idea of toiling for his daily bread and tiring himself out with long hours of physical exertion. But now he looked upon it as the essential part of a man's existence, and the rest after labour was the sweetest thing that he had yet known in life.

It must not be supposed that Sir Richard Gaunt had suddenly changed from a blackguard to a saint. Even those terrible hours of agony on the raft had been unable to accomplish so gigantic a task. But they had left their mark upon his life. The death of the girl, snatched almost miraculously from the web he had woven about her, his cry for life, his vow to serve God if only he might live, his prayer for forgiveness—all these had gripped him, and wrenched him out of the sordid groove in which he had hitherto crawled and crept like an insect. He was ready to receive fresh impressions; and here, in this little settlement, he received the stamp of a new life, a rough, stern life, where a man had to fight for his food, and asked nothing in return but rest after his labour.

In this mould the plastic mind of an impressionable man was rapidly shaped into a form entirely different

from that which it had worn in the whirl and gaiety of civilization. Not only were his companions men of a different type, but the whole atmosphere of the place was an exact antithesis to the foetid air of London. On the one side the blue, empty sea, on the other the great void desert of yellow sand, formed a scene in which the mind of a man might well turn from the frivolities of life, and face the mysteries of the unknown.

And so month after month Sir Richard Gaunt lived his simple life, and purified his mind and body of sin. And, by degrees, he learnt to value the calm of the desert and despise the pleasures and vanities which had once been the only things that really mattered to him. The change was gradual, but sincere. After the first great shock of that moment in which he had seen himself as he really was, and as he might be, there was nothing miraculous in the change. Removed from all temptation, and surrounded by men whose primitive passions and faults had nothing in common with the refined vice of modern civilization, his mind was naturally moulded into different views of life. The ground had been torn and furrowed by suffering, and was ready to receive the seeds of new ideas and methods of thought.

At first, indeed, he had chafed under the new conditions of existence, and only his dawning desire to atone for his past life prevented him from returning to civilization. He longed for the lighted pavements of London, for the love of well-dressed women, for wine, and laughter, and song. Moreover, he remembered the oath that he had sworn.

But neither his desire for pleasure nor his oath to George Crawshay prevailed against the vow he had made to God. He had prayed for life, and his prayer had been answered. Here at last was a chance of breaking away from all the old associations and temptations, and he was wise enough to see that it was a chance that might never

be given to him again. If he returned at once into the midst of temptation his purpose would falter. His old nature was still unregenerate. But here, in the desert, he could purge himself of sin, and when he was strong enough to fight against the world, he would return and marry Lady Betty Drake.

As for his oath, in the light of clear reason and a sane mind it seemed wicked and incapable of fulfilment. The brain of a healthy man views matters in a different way to the brain of a sot and a drunkard. He saw that his resolution to wreck his life and kill himself was the resolution of an unsound mind. He would make reparation. When he returned to England, he would pay back the thirty thousand pounds, and make a clean breast of everything. He would let the world know that George Crawshay was innocent. The oath itself no longer lay upon his conscience.

Several months passed, and the young man began to rise from the slough into which his past actions had dragged both his body and mind. Physically, he changed from a white-faced, weak-limbed roué to a swarthy, muscular seaman. The pure air, the simple food, and the hard, strenuous life had worked wonders on a frame that was naturally capable of development, but which suffered from the ravages of vice. His eyes grew clear and keen, his shoulders broadened, his limbs grew sturdy and capable of enduring long days of fatigue and exertion. For the first time since his early boyhood he enjoyed perfect health and found pleasure in an open-air life. He had learnt what it meant to be hungry and to have to sometimes fight for a bare existence.

The intellectual life was not so satisfactory as the physical. He had passed beyond the regions of all art and literature. His leisure time was chiefly spent in contemplation. His companions were men of few words, and with no ideas beyond those necessary to supply their bodily

wants. Their only amusement was a simple game of chance, played with fourteen white stones on a sort of chess-board marked out on the sand, and Gaunt rarely joined them. He tried to teach them draughts, which he had always believed to be their national game, and also bowls. Both of these games were easily played with white and black stones. But the men were unwilling pupils, and did not seem to care for anything that called for the exercise of skill and intellect.

And so the young man spent much of his spare time in thought, and he slowly acquired the calm gravity of the Oriental in this respect. He would sit on the edge of the desert motionless, and with his eyes fixed on the endless billows of yellow sand. Or else he would sit on the rocks by the sea and gaze out across the waters. And hour after hour he would breathe in the silence of great spaces, and the clearness of sky and sea, and his mind grew in harmony with these things.

And, facing sea or desert, he sometimes thought of the past, and the iron entered into his soul. But more often he thought of the future, and of how a man might make the best use of his life.

For eleven months Sir Richard Gaunt lived this existence with the simple children of the desert, and he grew into a quiet, strong-limbed, thoughtful man. And then the time came near for the arrival of the caravan from the Northwest.

Once a year a small group of traders visited the little settlement by the sea. They purchased the pearls which the men had collected from the oyster-beds, and left in exchange clothes, food, nets, fish-hooks, and whatever had been ordered at the last visit. The appearance of these people rarely caused much excitement, though they formed the only link with the world beyond. They came out of the desert, mere black specks, crawling over the dun sand; they stayed four days, and then returned again, and van-

ished into the immensity whence they had appeared. Such an occurrence would have caused weeks of conversation and expectation among a body of Englishmen placed in similar circumstances. But to these phlegmatic Easterns it was merely a fixed part of the machinery of nature, no more to be looked forward to than the advent of spring or winter.

This particular visit, however, was of more than usual interest, and formed the subject of a few quiet and reserved conjectures. For Ben Asan, the youngest son of the old patriarch, was going to return to the camp after the absence of two years, and he was returning with a new wife, and it was reported that she was of great beauty. She had cost him twenty pearls of the finest quality, and these had been remitted at the last departure of the caravan.

It was hardly to be expected that Sir Richard Gaunt, in spite of the change that had come over his mind, could regard the approach of the visitors with the calmness of his comrades. Its advent was the first link in the chain which reached to England. He could now return to his home, or, if he wished to stay in the desert, he could send a letter which would tell Lady Betty that he was still alive.

Day after day, when his work was done, he would go to the edge of the desert and watch the golden sand change to a dull brown plain, and see the shadows of night come tearing up from the east. And even after the whole scene had faded into darkness, he would sit there alone and look up at the stars, and listen for the first sounds of the caravan. Somewhere out there, in the vast dim spaces of the wilderness, it was creeping towards the little settlement, and bringing with it a voice from the great world beyond.

XIV

HAMIL

ONE evening, when the sky was ablaze with blue and crimson and gold, a small black speck crawled over the horizon and moved slowly towards the oasis by the sea.

Sir Richard Gaunt, seated on a hummock of sand, watched the approach of the caravan with hungry eyes, and when the darkness blotted out everything but the stars, he still waited, and stared across the hidden plain.

Behind him in the settlement there was a faint stir of excitement. On ordinary nights every one would have been asleep an hour after sunset, but to-night the men talked together in low measured voices, and the women twittered like sparrows. High up on one of the palms flared a rude lamp—a piece of twisted cotton rag planted in a bowl of fish oil. It flickered and smoked as the faint night breeze came up from the sea, but it gave enough light to serve its purpose. It was set as a beacon to guide the caravan across the desert.

He had much to occupy his thoughts as he watched there on the border of the great sand ocean. He had not yet decided whether to stay in the desert or whether he ought to return to civilization. He realized all that he owed to his present life. If it had not effected a radical change in his morals, it had at any rate given him a sound mind and a healthy body. And these ought to lay the foundation for a better life. But was he yet strong enough to resist temptation? Here in the desert, with hard work to do from morning to night, he had no time for pleasures, and even if he had the time, there was no means of indulging in them. He knew that any attempt

to make love to the wives of his companions would result in the death of himself and the woman. He had lived a pure life, but he was sensible enough to see that he could not have well done otherwise.

But the return to civilization, the glamour of the old life, the sight of beautiful women—that would be the test. Would he be strong enough to stand it? Six months in London might reduce him to the old level. His brain and body would deteriorate. He would revel in the joy of the first few months, but after that—he shuddered as he recalled what he had been before he had left England. He remembered the razor at his throat, the revolver at his forehead. In that former life of his there had lurked the terror that he could not understand. Here, at any rate, there was peace and safety. He seemed to have passed beyond the reach of George Crawshay.

After a long mental struggle he decided that he was not yet strong enough to return. He realized that he still longed for the pleasures of his old life, and the mere fact that he desired them indicated the danger of returning while he was in this state of mind. It was true that to a certain extent he had subdued his desires, and every month they grew fainter and more indefinite. But they had not been finally conquered, and he resolved to remain in the desert for another year.

And then he came to the question of Lady Betty Drake. The change in his mental attitude towards all the world had naturally included a very marked change in his feelings towards the woman who loved him. She had once been merely a possible income for the future, but he had now come to regard her with almost superstitious reverence, and he could not make up his mind whether it would be better to let her think of him as dead, or whether he ought to let her know the truth.

The solution of this problem would have been simple

if he had loved her. But his feelings were only those of regard for a noble woman. It said much for the change in the man's character that his thoughts were now for her happiness, and that he had no intention of marrying her for her money.

Yet this view of the matter only introduced fresh complications. It would be easy enough to return and marry her, and try to lead a new life. But if he did not intend to marry her, would it be better to let her think of him as dead, or to let her know the truth?

The question of sending this message by the caravan involved several other considerations. If he was to be counted as dead, his brother Henry would take his place at Gaunt Royal. His appreciation of virtues, which had hitherto only bored him, had not included an admiration for Henry's particular merits, and the prospect of suddenly rising from the dead and turning him out of his inheritance was not altogether an unpleasant one.

But he soon dismissed all such trivial thoughts from his mind. There, in the great solitudes of the wilderness, it was impossible to plan tricks like a spiteful schoolboy. He knew that he had to do that which was right. This much, at any rate, had he learnt in his adversity.

He decided to write to Lady Betty, and send the letter by the caravan. And then, in a year's time, he would return himself, and play a man's part in the busy world, which now seemed as far away from him as the moon itself.

Here, at any rate, was peace. He turned his face away from the desert and watched the only signs of life in that vast solitude of sand and sea. The flare of the lamp seemed only to intensify the darkness. A few small figures moved in a band of light between two vast shadows. The murmur of voices came to his ears like the sound of wind

in the trees. Was there ever a place so well designed by God to keep a man unspotted from the world.

Then suddenly there came a call from the silence of the desert, and an answering shout from the group of men under the trees. And at once the whole settlement hummed like a hive of bees. Men came forward with flaring lamps, and the women's voices rose to shrill cries of excitement. But Gaunt listened for other sounds that he expected to hear from the desert, and soon he heard the soft thud of hoofs on the sand and the voices of men.

He rose to his feet and retreated before the advancing line of camels. Then, as the first arrival came into the light, he stood aside to let them pass. The huge, ungainly beasts lumbered past him, and he counted them. Sixteen in all, and perhaps a dozen men, but he could not see in the faint light. The sight fascinated him. It was wonderful to think of the distance they had plodded across the trackless waste of sand. They seemed to bring with them the breath of civilization. In a vague, ridiculous way he thought of a hansom. These ugly beasts were the sole connecting link with the daily life of London.

As the last three passed him, abreast, and not in single file, the faint odour of some perfume came to his nostrils. It recalled more vividly than any words could have done the hothouse life which he had cast behind him. It was strange, startling, out of place in the pure air of the desert. It suggested, in some subtle manner, the temptations which he was still afraid to face.

He turned and followed the caravan, and stood by the side of his companions under the trees. Lights flared on all sides, and there was the grave ceremony of welcome. A young, swarthy fellow with a keen, hawk-like face came forward and embraced each of his brothers with ludicrous solemnity. Then he threw himself at his father's feet and received a blessing. The whole scene was quaint

and almost Biblical, and in the flare of the lamps it was really picturesque.

"So that is the son," Gaunt said to himself. "What about the wife?"

Ben Asan returned to the camels, and no one moved; then once more he came forward with a woman. Her face was veiled up to the eyes, but her form was slender and graceful. Gaunt regarded her with interest. A woman who would voluntarily exile herself in the wilderness for love of a man must be a woman of character. The other women in the settlement had done so, but then they were desert-born and desert-bred. This one had left the life of a city and followed her husband into what was scarcely better than a tomb.

Sir Richard Gaunt moved a little closer to the aged patriarch and watched the husband and wife prostrate themselves on the ground. One of the sons stood behind his father and held aloft a flaming torch. The whole scene was as clearly cut as a cameo. The old man mumbled something and raised his hands.

Then the two, still hand in hand, rose to their feet, and the young man uttered a single word.

"Hamil!"

The onlookers took up the cry, and the air rang and echoed with the word "Hamil." It came in full-throated chorus, and then was repeated by voice after voice, and then, after a pause, there was an echo of the name in the distance.

Sir Richard Gaunt kept his gaze fixed on the woman's face. He could see nothing but the eyes and the broad, low brow, and the gleam of dark hair. Then the eyes looked at him steadily and without shame, and as he encountered the look, a sudden fire seemed to scorch his body, and the blood leapt through his veins, and every nerve tingled. He turned on his heel and strode away into the darkness.

He had seen that look in a woman's eyes before.

Four days afterwards the caravan departed, bearing Sir Richard Gaunt's letter on the first stage of its long journey to England.

The letter was short, and did not concern itself with details. It ran as follows:

"DEAR BETTY,—You will be surprised to learn that I am still alive. I shall not return to England till next year. I am at present in the Desert of Arabia, learning to be a man. Please forget me, for I am not worthy of you. I only wanted to marry you for your money. I have been cruelly punished, and at last am able to see things clearly. I look up to you now as one who is far above me. I wish to repay you for all you have done. I can do it best by keeping out of your life. I work now from morning to night, and am contented. If I did not work I should starve. It is dull, and I have no pleasure but rest. Still I am content, and my health is good. Between you and me lie a thousand miles of sand, and all the journey from the nearest port to England. Perhaps you will think me a brute for writing like this. But I am at least honest. And always remember this: I am learning to be a man. Yours, in all reverence and affection, DICK GAUNT."

This letter, sealed, and made as imposing as possible with wax and tassels of silk, was committed to the charge of the ancient and honoured leader of the caravan. Sir Richard Gaunt produced four golden English sovereigns, and at once purchased the goodwill of the bearer. It was understood that the letter was of the highest importance, and that it was to be taken by a triangular route to Port Said, and then to be stamped and posted to England.

As Gaunt watched the line of camels fade to a thin thread, and then to a small speck on the horizon of sand, he sighed and wondered if he had done right. He had, at any rate, acted from unselfish motives. Then he returned to his work and had no more time to think of England.

He was surprised to notice that one of the camels was left behind. In the life of the desert these animals played as important a part as railways in England. It was easier to imagine the Great Western leaving an engine as a present to some obscure village in Gloucestershire than to comprehend a gift of such startling magnitude.

On inquiry he learnt that the new bride had wept so long and copiously for the animal which had carried her into captivity that Ben Asan had purchased it at a fabulous price. It was of no possible use, and was even an encumbrance, for it consumed food and water. But to Hamil it was a link with civilization, and she took exercise on it daily, as a lady might drive in the park. Gaunt laughed when he heard about it. This Hamil, of the dark eyes, was evidently destined to be the new woman of the desert, the pioneer of strange, unfeminine actions.

In a few weeks' time, however, he began to take a most undesirable interest in this woman who had come so strangely into the desert from the world beyond. He had only heard that she was beautiful, for he had never seen more than her eyes and forehead. But there was no doubt about the voluptuous grace of her form. It was also evident that she took some interest in him. She never passed him without looking him boldly in the face, and more than once she had spoken to him.

On these occasions his reply had been of the curtest, and, to do him justice, he tried to avoid her as much as possible. But the mere sight of her was sufficient to quicken the blood in his veins, and the sound of her voice vibrated through every nerve. In some manner, which he could hardly explain, he was afraid of her.

It says much for the change in the man's character that he found no pleasure in the spell which the woman had cast over him. He knew well enough that she had marked him down as her prey, and that she was only

waiting for an opportunity. He had seen that much in her eyes. But he did not respond to her glances, and fear was the predominant feeling in his heart. He took good care to avoid any opportunity which might prove the weakness of his armour.

But fate had decreed that his strength should be tried to the utmost. One day he slipped on the fishing-boat and injured his knee-cap so severely that he could not walk. The injury necessitated rest, and, in consequence, he was left behind in the camp, while all the other able-bodied men went out to sea.

Then one evening he lay down close to the fresh water spring at the edge of the oasis, and thought of this new problem that had entered into his life.

It was near sunset, but the boat had not yet returned. The sky was a flaming splendour of violet and crimson and gold. The desert beyond was a rich ochre, and its very desolation was beautiful. There was no sound to break the silence but the bubbling of the spring.

Then there were soft footsteps, and, looking round, he saw Hamil with a jar upon her shoulder. She had come out alone to draw water from the spring.

She did not speak as she came close to him, but he could see her smile, though only her eyes and forehead were visible. It was the smile of one who is going to triumph.

He looked away from her across the desert, but as he heard the gurgle of the water in the jar, he looked round again, and his sight was fascinated by the supple curves of her stooping body. He could not take his eyes off her, and he was afraid.

Then she suddenly lifted her head, and Gaunt trembled in every limb. The veil had slipped down from her face, and he looked into the full blaze of her loveliness. Quick as thought she dropped the jar and replaced the veil.

She did not speak, but he saw the burning passion in



"May the dead rise up against me and destroy me," he whispered, **"if I do not keep my oath."** *Page 26*



her eyes, and knew that no accident had disclosed her charms. She filled her jar again and left without a word. His eyes followed her till she disappeared.

Then once more he gazed across the desert with the look of a hunted animal seeking for some means of escape. His face was flushed, his eyes glittered, his heart beat furiously. The glorious beauty of the woman had gripped him, and he knew that he must release himself from her grasp.

He looked seaward towards the setting sun, across the golden plain of water. To east and west, to north and south, he was hemmed in by an impassable desolation.

Yet he knew that he must find some path, even across the pathless wastes of land or sea.

Sir Richard Gaunt did not sleep that night. He did not even return to his hut. He lay on the sand at the edge of the desert and stared into the darkness, as though perchance he might see some way out of the danger that confronted him.

But the madness was still in his veins, and he only saw the face of the woman, the perfect grace and beauty of it, and the passion in the dark eyes.

And there in the darkness he fought a great battle against his own desires. A year previously there would have been no doubt about the result—in fact, there would have been no battle at all.

But before dawn broke in the east he had conquered his own desire. The silence and peace of the night on the fringe of that vast solitude had played its quiet part in the contest. The great spaces of sky and sand and sea had so belittled the value of human passions that the man found strength to resist his own desires. The very stars which gemmed the darkness overhead had seemed to look down on him with blazing eyes of contempt.

And when at last the dawn broke, and the grey sky was flushed with the splendour of another day, he knew

that he must leave the settlement and go forth into the desert.

He looked round at the various objects which had come into sight with the dawn, at the circle of palm trees, at the huts, at the sea, at the billowy waste of sand, over which the sun was glinting like a ball of fire. His eyes moved from one object to another in the familiar scene, and then they rested on the camel. The huge, ungainly beast had lifted its head and was looking plaintively at the spring.

Here was the means of escape; here was the ship that would carry him beyond the reach of temptation and desire.

He would go out into the desert, but he would go alone.

XV

THE GREAT SOLITUDE

A BROWN wilderness of sand, trackless as the ocean, and without a landmark to guide the traveller! Overhead a sky burning blue, as monotonous as the sand beneath! And in this wilderness a single speck moving slowly eastward!

Three days previously Sir Richard Gaunt had left the little settlement, and had set forth on his journey into the desert. He had left unobserved, like a thief in the night. At first he had thought of departing openly, but he saw that this would be attended with insuperable difficulties. The camel was as essential to him as a train to a traveller in England. Hamil would, of course, refuse to sell the animal, so he took it without the formality of striking a bargain, and left behind all his worldly wealth in payment. This consisted of his gold watch and a little store of pearls, which represented his share of the profits in the fishing business.

He had taken with him food for fifteen days, and water which would last him a week with care. He had gathered an idea of the route from a conversation with the leader of the caravan. It lay for five hundred miles due east, and then ran northwards. He had no compass with him, but the man who had explained the route knew nothing of the compass, and had expressed his directions in a manner that the simplest could understand. The sun and the stars were the only guides in that wilderness.

The first oasis lay nearly a hundred miles to the east of the coast line, but after that these green islands in the desolate ocean of sand appeared at intervals of about

eighty miles. Sir Richard Gaunt had taken down minute directions as to the position of sun and stars, and anything that could be reckoned as a landmark, and he had not the slightest doubt about being able to trace out his entire journey across the desert. He might even fall in with another caravan on the great trail which ran from the north to the south like a high road.

On the evening of the fifth day he sighted a black speck against the sky line, many miles to the south, and, altering his course, found that he had reached the first oasis.

He stayed a week in this place, and then set out for the next oasis. He found it with less difficulty than he had anticipated, and he only remained there two days. The solitude of the desert was beginning to prey upon his nerves. He was now anxious to move on as quickly as possible, to reach the great caravan route, where he could hope occasionally to hear the sound of a human voice and see his fellow-men.

Never before had he realized the meaning of complete solitude. The little settlement by the sea had come as near to isolation as he thought possible. The continual company of the same few people day after day was loneliness after the life of a great city, and even after the life at Gaunt Royal, where, at any rate, he was in touch with the events of the world. But this surpassed anything that he had ever imagined. He had read of men who had been cast on desert islands, of men who had suffered lifelong imprisonment and made friends with the mice and even spiders in their cells. But up to now he had never been able to grasp the reality of their feelings.

At last, however, he knew what it was to be alone, completely and absolutely alone, save for the shambling beast which represented his only hope of ever meeting his fellow-men.

The long, waving stretches of dun sand, the blue arch of the sky, seemed to form a prison as secure and certain

as the walls of a fortress. He was able to move about, it was true, but he only fancied himself as a prisoner on an endless chain. He could move in any direction, and for any distance, but he could not escape. Ten, twenty, thirty, fifty, a hundred miles! What did it matter? There was still the same boundary of desert, and still the same unchanging roof of sky.

He made a friend of the camel, and used to talk to it hour after hour, as though it could understand and answer him. Under similar circumstances, a dog would have been a real companion. But a camel is a singularly unresponsive animal, and although Gaunt fancied it was a sympathetic friend, he could not flatter himself that it understood much of what he said to it. He had read, however, of all that a spider meant to a man who was serving a long term of imprisonment, and a camel was, at any rate, a more sociable, if less intelligent, being than a spider.

At the end of a month he had reached the fifth oasis, and had travelled more than three hundred miles from the settlement. Another two hundred miles would bring him to the great caravan route. There he proposed to remain until he wanted to return to England.

He left the fifth oasis with a plentiful supply of dates and water, and travelled for six days, bearing forty-five degrees to the south of the point where the sun rose. At the end of the sixth day he began to be anxious. He should have come to the next oasis, for he was travelling fifteen miles a day, but, wherever he looked, there was still an unbroken vista of sand. He only had food and water for another five days.

He was uncertain how to act. He had evidently gone too far to the north or too far to the south, but he could not tell in which direction he had made the error. He scanned the horizon in vain for any sign of a tree. But it was not easy to see far on the great undulating plain. The

air, heated by the sun, moves unceasingly, and obstructs a clear view in any direction.

He took a penny from his pocket and tossed it in the air.

"Heads, south; tails, north," he said to the camel.

"Heads it is, old boy," he cried, and thrust the coin under the camel's nose, as though to show that there was no cheating.

Then he remembered the last time he had tossed and the result of the decision.

"The coins lie," he said aloud after a pause. "We will go north, See-saw, due north."

And northwards he went, and before another day had passed, he sighted some dark blotches on the horizon.

As he drew nearer, he noticed that the palms were shorter than usual, and that there was an absence of green herbage at the foot of them.

It was not till he came within a quarter of a mile of them that he realized what had happened. The oasis had lain in the track of a great sandstorm, and had been almost made one with the desert.

When he reached the trees he found that he could almost touch the leaves of some. It was easy enough to gather the fruit. But he could not find any trace of water. Perhaps the spring lay under a dozen feet of sand.

He stayed there the night and then proceeded on his way. A new danger confronted him. He had read of these sandstorms, more terrible than any storm at sea. A death from which there was no escape—a choking, blinding, horrible death. They were not frequent, but, when they came, they swept every living thing into one smooth brown tomb.

When he had gone about ten miles on his journey to the next oasis, his attention was drawn to a small piece of scarlet cloth sticking out of a mound of sand. He dis-

mounted and pulled at it with both his hands. It resisted his efforts, and seemed to be part of something buried deep in the sands.

Sir Richard Gaunt dug away the sand with both his hands until his fingers came to something solid. Then he paused for a moment. He knew what he had found, but did not know whether he wished to see more of it.

He decided that it was his duty to finish his work, and, after a little more scooping out of the sand, he bared a face and body to the sunshine.

He recognized the face, and, half shutting his eyes, he fumbled at the clothes and found a leather pouch. From this he took a letter, sealed with red wax and decorated with tassels of green silk. The handwriting was his own, and it was addressed to Lady Betty Drake. Close to it were four English sovereigns, and they had been pressed so tightly against it, that they had left four circular marks on the paper.

Sir Richard Gaunt slipped the letter and the gold into his pocket, and then proceeded to heap up the sand on the body. When he had finished, and the smooth mound had resumed its placid appearance, he remounted the camel and proceeded on his way towards the next oasis.

XVI

THE VOICE OF THE DESERT

AFTER a rapid journey of three days, in which he travelled day and night, he reached the next oasis. He was pleased to find that it was large and watered by no less than three springs. He had been without water for twenty-four hours, and drank greedily of the first bubbling stream. He was becoming a fatalist, and he looked upon the finding of this refuge as a sign of his fitness to live. If he had missed it, there was no doubt that he would have died of thirst. As it was, his life had been spared, and he did not doubt that it had been spared for some specific purpose.

The oasis was nearly forty acres in extent, and the palm trees round its edge were so thickly massed together as to form an almost impenetrable wall of timber. The undergrowth was rich and luxuriant. It was a place that a man might well linger in.

Here he would rest and wait for the approach of a caravan. He was still within a hundred and fifty miles of the Great Route, but he argued that an oasis of such size and importance must be well known to all travellers in the desert.

He was well satisfied with his quarters, and in a few days' time he recovered in some degree from the overwhelming fear which had seized his mind. The healthy life of the past year had fortified his mind. But he resolved to remain in his inland refuge and await the arrival of his fellowmen.

A month passed, and no one came to the oasis. But at the end of the month an event happened which cut off Sir

Richard Gaunt from either advance or retreat, and left him as helplessly stranded as a sailor cast on an island without a boat or the means of making one.

The camel, which had been ailing for some days, and which had at times even refused food, lay down on its side and closed its eyes and died. Sir Richard Gaunt, who had looked on the animal as part of the desert, and likely to live for centuries, was quite overcome by this final blow to all his hopes. It was true that he did not intend to proceed on his journey till he could find some companions, but he had always looked on the camel as essential to his progress. Without it he would be a mere encumbrance to any caravan.

Sir Richard spent a whole day in covering the body with sand, and by sunset he had raised a noble tumulus half as high as a tall palm. On the top of this he placed a wreath of palm leaves, and regarded his work with the satisfaction of a man who has done his best.

Then he sat down on a mound of sand, and looked out across the desert at the setting sun. He was sad, and his sadness was not all due to the fact that he was hopelessly cut off from further advance. He felt that he had lost a friend, a dumb, unsympathetic friend, it is true, but one who had always done its duty; and he was cut off from all life save that of the vegetable world. Not a bird or animal would come to cheer him by its movements. He was in a green prison of foliage, and he could not leave it, except for a grave of sand.

Month followed month, and still no caravan came to the oasis, and Sir Richard Gaunt began to give up all hope of ever leaving his place of refuge. At first he cursed his own folly and the cowardice which had prevented him from pressing on to some point which lay on the Great Route.

But by degrees he became resigned to his fate. The solitude and the silence, which at first were insufferable,

became so much a part of his daily life that they ceased to be noticeable.

Day after day he reviewed his past, and wondered what the future held in store for him. At first his thoughts were a mere chaos, out of which he could evolve nothing except a vague sense of shame and a fear of punishment.

The thought of his oath to Crawshay did not trouble him. A more healthy state of mind regarded the fulfilment of it as wicked and absurd. But he was haunted by the memory of the few words he had uttered in his agony of thirst and hunger on the raft.

"Give me the future and I will serve Thee till the end of my days."

This voice alone rose above the tumult of his varied memories—a sharp, clear note that seemed to echo and re-echo in his brain.

Yet it was a vow that could never be kept. How could he, Sir Richard Gaunt, serve God till the end of his days? The best he could do would be merely a negative service. He could lead a clean life; but this would be a purely selfish atonement for the past. It would benefit no one but himself. If a man has stolen a hundred pounds, he can hardly make reparation by resolving to steal nothing more.

God had no use for him. It was clear that he had lived his life, and that nothing more was required of him. The shipwreck cutting him off from civilization, the temptation of Hamil driving him out from the society of his fellow-men, the sandstorm which had prevented his letter from reaching England, the death of the camel, which had kept him a prisoner on a few acres of herbage set like some island in the midst of an impassable ocean, all these were details in a definite plan. He was an outcast left to die in the wilderness, a thing of no account in the great scheme of the universe.

Day after day these thoughts whirled through his brain

in chaos. But, like the nebulous matter that once resolved itself into the solid earth, they gradually materialized into a single thought.

"I must get out of this," he said to himself, "and I must try to do some good in the world."

But it was evident that relentless justice was going to pursue him to the last. At the end of six months of loneliness and self-examination and self-reproach he was taken ill. For a few days he was strong enough to walk about, and eat his food, and sit on the edge of the oasis staring into the desert. Then he became weak and dizzy, and he was seized with a great fear.

Gaunt did not know the precise nature of the disease which had attacked him, but he felt that he was very near to death. All the strength of his mind and body seemed to be slowly dying.

Once before he had been face to face with death, and then there had seemed no possible chance of escape. Now he was to die in comparative comfort. Food and water lay close to him. On the soft carpet of herbage by the spring he could die almost as comfortably as on a bed. Yet the fact did not make the reality of death less terrible. On the contrary, he had more time to think about death. His mind was not occupied with any struggle for life. He had merely to await the end.

"Give me the future," he murmured, "and I will serve Thee to the end of my days."

There was no answer to his prayer but the faint sound of a breeze among the palm leaves and the gurgling of the stream. Through a gap in the trees he could see the yellow wastes of the desert, that impassable ocean which cut him off from all chance of doing either good or evil in the world.

On the third day he became delirious and talked incessantly to himself. And then, in the evening, he passed into the rest of sleep.

When he awoke it was dark, and he could see nothing but a few stars overhead. His body was almost lifeless, and he could not move a finger. But his brain was so clear and active that it seemed to be able to grasp the whole scheme of the universe.

He not only saw himself as he really was, and as he might be, but he saw the whole social life of England as it was, and as it might be. He saw the lusts, the tyranny, the greed, the deceit, the hollow joys, the awful sufferings of modern life. And as he saw them, he realized how small a thing he was in this ghastly jumble of civilization, and yet how great a thing a man might be, if he could fight against the evil in the world. Such a work might atone for all the worst sins of a man's life.

"Give me the future," he whispered, "and I will serve Thee till the end of my days."

There was no answer, but the whole darkness seemed to quiver like the lips of one who is going to speak.

"My life is forfeit," he cried again. "If there is no work for me to do, no means of atonement, take my life, and have mercy on my soul."

Still there was silence, but the agony and fear of the man passed from him, and once more life seemed to be returning to his limbs.

And in the darkness he saw the splendid vision of a new world.

BOOK II

I

A HOME OF REST

"I CAN'T make them come right, Lady Betty, I really can't."

The speaker, a pretty, demure little girl of twenty, pressed her hands to her forehead, and frowned at a long row of figures in front of her.

"Never mind, dear. How much are you out?"

"One pound thirteen shillings and sevenpence. I've never been so much out before."

"Well, don't worry about it, dear. I dare say you'll find out the mistake in the morning. You've had a hard day."

"They're bewitched; Lady Betty, the figures are bewitched. They seem to dance up and down and laugh at me."

"Shut up the book," said Lady Betty sternly.

The girl closed it with a sigh, and smoothed her hair, which had become sadly ruffled in the contest with the problems of simple addition.

Lady Betty leant over a large desk covered with papers and picked up an envelope bearing the advertisement of a well-known firm of perruquiers.

"Are you doing anything to-night, Alice?" she asked.

A tinge of colour came to the girl's white cheeks.

"No," she replied. "Nothing much, your ladyship."

"Alice! I think I've told you—don't speak to me as if you were a servant."

"Yes, Lady Betty."

"You're not a servant. You're a helper in my work. Well, here are two stall—no, dress-circle, seats for the *Pink Walnut*, if you would care to go—with a friend."

"Oh, thank you, Lady Betty, so much. It is sweet of you."

Lady Betty handed across the tickets with a smile.

"I don't think the piece will improve your mind, Alice, but it may amuse you; and if you have nothing to do——"

"No, nothing much," stammered the girl; "at least, this will fit in nicely with our plans. We were going for a walk."

"We? Oh, yes, Alice. Well, you can go to the *Pink Walnut* now. Are there any more letters to answer?"

"No, your—Lady Betty, I mean."

"That is good. You can go in five minutes, Alice. Are you happy here?"

"Oh, yes, Lady Betty."

"In spite of the sums that won't come right?"

"Oh, yes, Lady Betty. I'll find out the mistake tomorrow. I think I am tired to-night."

"You are not thinking of leaving me?"

"No—o," stammered the girl. "Not yet, Lady Betty."

"But some day, eh? Well, I hope he's worthy of you. But wait for a year, Alice. You are very young. I want you for this next year. I intend to give you another pound a week."

"Another pound a week!" murmured the girl. "Oh, Lady Betty!"

"Yes, another pound a week, Alice."

"Why, I shall be earning more than——" She paused and blushed furiously.

"More than you were before, Alice," said Lady Betty, with a sad smile. "But you'll have to earn it. There is a hard time before us both this winter, Alice—work

from morning to night. They say that there are one hundred and fifty thousand people starving in London. And it's a cruel winter—but there, child, go out and see the play, and don't think about work till you come back to-morrow."

The girl rose to her feet and put on her hat and cloak, which were hanging on a peg by the door.

"Good-night, Lady Betty, and thank you so much."

"Good-night, dear, and be sure you have a good evening. Later on we may have to work in the evenings. But you mustn't think of marriage just yet. And when you do, you mustn't leave me. You must bring him round some day—perhaps I can keep you both with me. I don't want to lose you."

The girl's eyes glittered, and, though she did not speak, the look on her face was eloquent of gratitude. Then she left the room, and softly closed the door behind her.

Five years had left their mark on the face and character of Lady Betty Drake. She was no longer young when Sir Richard left England, but a healthy open-air life had given her all the glow and strength of youth. Now she was white-faced and distinctly middle-aged. For five years she had spared neither body nor brain in her work among the poor of London.

Down in one of the worst quarters of the East End she built a home of refuge for the lowest and most miserable of her own sex, and there she started a work that was destined to place her name among the list of those women who have left their mark on the world.

Lady Betty only allowed herself a few seconds of reverie after the departure of Alice Carter. The episode of the two sweethearts had for the moment disturbed her mental balance. But she soon regained her business-like composure, and rising from her seat, took down a letter-file from the shelf. Then she drew out a piece of pale blue hand-made paper, and opened the letter out on the desk

before her. She read it through carefully again and again. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MADAM,—Failing the discovery of a certain person within the next two months we shall have a large sum of money at our disposal to devote to the cause which you have so much at heart. We have been debating whether to use it in a fresh venture on similar lines to the one which you have started, or whether to apply it to the enlargement of a scheme which is already a working concern, and which has an organization to deal with those who are to benefit by the legacy. Although nothing definite can yet be settled, as the term named in the will has not yet expired, we should like to have the pleasure of a few words with you. If convenient to you, Mr. John Sarl, junior, who is one of the trustees, will call on you at three o'clock on Thursday next.—We have the honour to remain, yours obediently, JOHN SARL and SON."

In reply to this Lady Betty had written to say that she would be pleased to see Mr. John Sarl, junior, at 6:30 P. M.

She was now awaiting his arrival. She had no intention of falling in with any scheme which would take the reins out of her own hands, but she was well aware that her own income was quite insufficient for the great task that lay before her, and she shrank from an appeal to public charity. It was possible that she might be able to accept this money, or else be of assistance to those who had the handling of it.

At 6:30 to the minute, Mr. John Sarl, junior, was announced. He was a small, thin-faced man, and Lady Betty was relieved to find that he was well advanced in years. The term "junior" had suggested to her a smart young sprig of a lawyer, with whom it would be difficult to discuss matters at all freely. This man, however, could not have been a day under fifty, and was probably nearer sixty. His hair was almost white, and there were deep lines about his mouth and eyes.

"This is a great honour, I assure you," he said, after

the preliminary greetings had passed between them, "a great honour to have the privilege of talking to you, Lady Betty. I think we explained ourselves in the letter we ventured to send to you. It occurred to us that something might be done—yes, certainly something might be done."

"I understand you have not got this money yet?"

"No, no. I fear not—that is to say, I hope not. A most unfortunate case, Lady Betty, most unfortunate. It was left by our late client to his sister, if she could be found. At the time of his death he had not seen her for ten years. She had left home—the old, sad story, I fear. You have heard it often——"

"Very often."

"We have advertised every day for five years; we have employed detectives—a sad waste of money, I fear—so much gone out of the estate, but necessary and proper expenditure. We have heard nothing of the missing woman. I fear she is dead, but perhaps not, perhaps not. The world is a large place, and even London—so much might have happened to her in these fifteen years."

"How terrible!" said Lady Betty slowly. "Perhaps the poor thing is starving, and with all this money waiting for her."

"Yes, but we have done all in our power. We could do no more. Yes, there is half a million pounds waiting for her."

"Half a million?"

"Yes, nearly that. A lot of good could be done with it, Lady Betty. Perhaps it is all for the best. If this poor thing came into it, or some drunken husband—well, maybe, it is all for the best. But to come to the point, Lady Betty. I think we expressed our views in the letter. Now, what do you say to our proposal?"

"The money would be very useful," Lady Betty replied. "My own money is tied up, and I can only use the income. There is so much work to be done. It frightens

me to think of it. This home, as perhaps you know, is only a centre. We have others in the country—even abroad in the Colonies. Eventually they will become self-supporting. At least, that is what I hope. But at present they require money. There is room for ten times as many. I take the women from their surroundings, give them something to live for, teach them how to earn an honourable living, and when they leave they are strong enough to fight against evil.”

“Good, very good, but the past—the stain cannot be washed out, Lady Betty.”

“It is washed out, Mr. Sarl, at least, so far as the world is concerned. Our homes are not branded with any name. They are refuges for the destitute, even social clubs, but they are not known as being homes for a particular class. The woman who enters our doors leaves her past behind her. Often she emerges with another name. She becomes a good worker, an honourable woman, sometimes even a faithful wife.”

“A wife? You do not mean to say——”

“Yes,” she interrupted sharply, “why not? Is only a man to be given a chance of true happiness?” And as the words came from her lips, she thought of Sir Richard Gaunt.

“Of course, of course,” Mr. Sarl replied gently. “Very proper—ah, you are the sort of woman we want in the world, Lady Betty. If we could only pull together. You ought to have the handling of this money. Now, can’t we fix up something?”

“Are you willing to place it absolutely in my hands—to use as I like?”

The lawyer looked on the carpet and traced out a pattern with his umbrella.

“Not quite that, I’m afraid,” he said, after a pause. “No, that would hardly be proper or business-like, Lady Betty, would it? It would be unusual, and I don’t think

quite according to the testator's ideas. But, if we could combine—if, say, you would consent to a trustee whom we would appoint——”

“It would hamper me considerably, Mr. Sarl. I have my own ideas on these matters, and like to work without hindrance——”

“Oh, there would be nothing of that sort, nothing, I can assure you. I thought of suggesting that two trustees should be appointed, and that you should be one, and that the money should be advanced to buy houses and land, or for any good purpose that you both approved of, but that you should have sole authority to spend the money so advanced, without control, entirely as you pleased. But we can talk over the details another time. Is the main idea acceptable to you?”

“The money would be a great help. I should like to have another talk with you, Mr. Sarl, when it is certain that the money can be used for this purpose. Is there any objection to letting me know the name of the man who has left the money?”

“None at all, Lady Betty,” said the lawyer, rising to his feet. “This money is left under the will of the late Mr. George Crawshay.”

“Crawshay,” said Lady Betty, “Crawshay—I seem to remember——”

“Ah, yes, ah yes—a sad case, a most painful case. Poor fellow, it was done in a moment of passion, I've no doubt. Yes, yes. Well, I must be off, Lady Betty; late hours these for a business man, and my wife——”

“Mr. Crawshay was a friend of Sir Richard Gaunt's.”

“Yes, left him thirty thousand pounds in his will—why, Heaven only knows. Did you know poor Sir Richard?”

“Yes,” Lady Betty replied slowly. “I knew him very well. Good-night, Mr. Sarl. Please come and see me

again—in two months' time—I will try and work out a scheme.”

“Good-night, Lady Betty. I hope we shall be able to work together.”

When the lawyer had left the room, Lady Betty re-seated herself in the chair before her desk and dipped her pen in the ink. But although she had several private letters to write, she did not put the pen to paper, and the ink dried on the nib. She placed the end of the pen-holder in her mouth and stared at one of the windows.

“Thirty thousand pounds,” she said to herself. “He must have been a great friend of Dick’s.”

She recalled the unpleasant incident of Lord Carfax’s death, and her mind went back to the days at Gaunt Royal. Then she began to think of Sir Richard Gaunt, and at once pulled up her thoughts with a sharp jerk. This was a matter that she never allowed to obtrude itself in business hours.

She dipped her pen in the ink again and commenced to write, and in a few seconds she was only thinking of the recipient of her letter, a woman who was a shorthand writer in Winnipeg, and who had been literally rescued from the gutter, where she had been found lying in a drunken sleep. Her mind resembled a highly-trained horse, which can be checked in the middle of a headlong gallop, turned round, and sent off in another direction.

When she had finished the letter, she sealed it up, addressed it, and commenced another. And she occupied herself in this way for an hour and a half. These letters were not strictly business letters. They were written as from one friend to another, but they were all part of a great scheme for keeping in touch with those who had left the Home.

Then a servant came in with a tray, and the lifted covers revealed a chop, some boiled potatoes, and spinach. Lady Betty stamped her letters and handed them to the

girl to post; then she ate her frugal meal, and read an evening paper which the servant had brought in on the tray. Never for a moment did she leave herself time to think about the past.

Then she left the table and seated herself in an easy chair which was close to the fire. She allowed herself ten minutes' rest before resuming her work, and this was spent in a way which would have jarred on the feelings of most charitable women. She took a cigarette out of a box which lay on the mantelpiece, placed it in a tortoise-shell holder, and lit it. It was a real pleasure to her, for it was the only one she allowed herself in the day. During these ten minutes she refused to see any one, for she was accustomed to interview women who looked on smoking as the accompaniment of a fast and vicious life.

When she had finished the cigarette, she rose to her feet and opened the window to let the smell of smoke out of the room. It was a cold night, and a north wind blew fiercely down the street. The view from the window was similar to that which may be seen in many of the slum thoroughfares of London. The houses were mean, ugly, and dilapidated. They rose straight from the edge of the pavement, without any intervening rail or strip of garden. The Home itself was like its neighbours in this respect. The tide of human misery flowed up to its very doors.

The cold air would have sent many women shivering back to the warmth of the fire, but Lady Betty, regardless of consequences, drew in deep breaths of it, and looked down the street. There were few people to be seen, but from the hideous wall of houses came all the sounds of human life—the wailing of children, the coarse laughter of women, the shouts of men, now and then the distant sound of a blow, followed by a scream. Through broken window-panes and ill-fitting doors the noises of humanity filtered out into the night.

A wider thoroughfare ran at right angles to the end of the street, and this was a vivid blaze of light. Black figures passed to and fro against the flare of paraffin torches, a confused murmur of voices formed an obligato accompaniment to the nearer and more distinct sounds. A barrel-organ tinkled far away in the distance.

Then, from the other end of the street, which seemed to vanish in darkness, as a path loses its way in the wilderness, there came a few derisive yells and shrieks of laughter.

A moment later Lady Betty saw a man walking slowly along the middle of the road. A few yards behind him marched a dozen gutter urchins, pushing and jostling each other. It was not an uncommon sight, but the man in such cases usually lurches from side to side, and turns round to pour out a torrent of filthy language.

This man, however, walked straight on, and appeared to be perfectly sober. It was only when he came nearer that the reason for the little crowd became apparent. He was dressed in some long dark garment that reached to his ankles. His feet and head were bare. Possibly he was some foreigner from the Oriental Exhibition at Earl's Court.

As he came still closer, and the glare of a gas lamp fell upon his face, Lady Betty saw that he was lean and dark-skinned. His black hair descended almost to his shoulders, and his beard and moustache and whiskers were shaggy and unkempt. He moved along slowly, apparently unconscious of the train of derisive followers. His arms were folded, and his head bowed on his breast.

Then he suddenly stopped, and raised his face to the sky and stretched out both hands towards the east.

"Woe unto you, accursed city!"

His voice rang out like a clarion, above all the mean noises of the night. The boys fell back from him, and

giggled. Doors and windows opened down the street, and towlsed heads were thrust out.

"Woe unto you, accursed city!" Again the voice rang out, clear and distinct as a bugle-call for battle.

"Go it darkie!" shouted a man huskily from the vantage point of an upper window. "Give it 'em 'ot, Moses!"

And the little boys danced and shrieked with laughter.

Then a policeman appeared, mysteriously, from nowhere, as they do in the worst quarters of London. His burly form moved steadily towards the tall figure with the outstretched hands.

"Move along, gov'nor," he said roughly. "We can't 'ave this 'ere, you know. You're obstructin'."

The man slowly dropped his hands to his side and returned down the street into the darkness. One of the little boys, emboldened by the protection of the law, threw a lump of mud at the retreating figure. Then the policeman threatened, and the crowd dispersed.

Lady Betty shut down the window and returned to her letter writing.

But as she went to sleep that night she still heard the ringing tones of the voice. She could not understand why the words of a religious fanatic should have left so deep an impression upon her mind.

II

THE IDEALIST

OVER a fireless grate in the tiny back room of an East End lodging-house sat the man who hoped to reform the social and moral conditions of the world.

The furniture of the room consisted of a sugar-box, which was being used as a chair, a cracked jug and basin sat on the floor in the corner, and three coarse brown rugs, one of which was rolled up to form a pillow. On the window-sill stood a loaf of bread, a knife, and two bottles, one of them filled with water, and the other converted into a useful candlestick.

The whole scene suggested abject poverty, but no one could have called it squalid. It was rather the encampment of a soldier on the field of battle. The necessities of life were reduced to a minimum.

The figure of the man himself would have redeemed any scene from the commonplace squalor which characterizes the homes of the very poor in London. His thin brown face, his long black hair and shaggy beard suggested some prophet of the Old Testament. His chin rested upon his hands, and his eyes, fierce and dark, seemed to look through the bare walls of his dwelling-place to the great city that encompassed him on every side like a sea.

Sir Richard Gaunt, after an absence of five years, had returned to England. Apart from the change in his personal appearance, due largely to the growth of his hair and beard, his whole manner had so altered that no one could have ever identified him with the man who had left for Australia on the *Santigan*.

Save that all changes in a man's life are due to the power of a Supreme Being, no supernatural agency had been necessary for this change. The hours of agony on the raft, the new life lived among the simple workers of the desert, the long days spent in a journey across the wilderness, the illness which had reduced all physical resistance to the lowest ebb, the repentance, the knowledge of how a man's life should be lived—all these had been the seeds which might one day grow into a forest of sturdy trees. The physical change had prepared the ground for the mental, and the mental for the spiritual.

Then, after the recovery from an illness which had brought the man near to death, there had come another year of solitude, in which he had been given time to grapple with the new problems that had arisen before his mind. And then nearly two years of wandering in the desert with a band of Tuaregs scarcely less savage than nature itself.

And during those years the seeds of thought grew fiercely in a fertile soil. The new ideas, at first small and indeterminate, gradually formulated themselves into a definite plan of action. The uncertain hopes and desires grew into a fixed purpose.

And when at last he reached a port, he resolved to return to England and do the work that he had been called upon to do.

He worked his passage to London on a tramp steamer, and landed with four pounds in his pocket. It was a small amount for the campaign that lay before him, but he thought that it would serve. His creed was founded on the idea that a great reformer should be content with the barest necessities of life.

But money would be wanted.

There lay the essence of the whole scheme, the one practical difficulty in a campaign, which had its motives in the highest aspirations of heart and intellect. It was

a confession of weakness, but it was the truthful confession of a man who realizes the strength of his enemy.

A thousand years ago no money would have been required. Eloquence, fierce religious fervour, perhaps even the help of fire and sword—all these would have sufficed. But not, in the twentieth century, when the huge and hideous idol of money dominated the whole world, there could be no victory without the means of organizing a great campaign. At the present time the word "means" denotes one thing, and one thing alone—money.

Sir Richard was practically penniless. Two days after his return he had seriously considered the advisability of declaring his true identity. The declaration would have placed him in the possession of money. And anything he had to say would come more forcibly from the lips of a large landed proprietor than from the mouth of an itinerant beggar. But the record of his past rose up before him like a wall. He had no wish to pose as a converted sinner. His conversion was too deep for that. He wished to be regarded as the man who had come from the deserts of the East, and who had brought with him the truths that a man can find in great solitudes.

Yet money must be found—a gigantic sum of money. A thousand preachers must be provided with their daily bread. There must be no begging by the wayside. And for yet another reason money must be found. It must be shown that those who have the handling of great wealth can yet live the simple and austere life of an anchorite.

He picked up a copy of a halfpenny paper and read a short paragraph which concerned him intimately. It ran as follows:

"DISORDERLY, BUT NOT DRUNK.

"A curious scene was witnessed in Piccadilly last night. A wild-eyed, long-haired man, whose garb and appearance suggested the Desert of Earl's Court, thought it a fitting place to give vent to his views on the evils of wealth and the general

decadence of modern society. He collected a large crowd, and for a few moments the street was blocked. But the police, unmindful of the ideal, but fortunately careful of realities, haled him off to the nearest police station, where the state of his mind was inquired into. We understand that the doctor said he was not drunk, and he was dismissed with a caution. He looked like some prophet of the Old Testament, but he must have felt smaller than that."

Sir Richard Gaunt's face darkened as he read the paragraph. Then his eyes caught the heading of the next paragraph, and it was a curious contrast to the one which preceded it.

**"THE RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD SAYS
LIFE IS A BURDEN."**

The ironical contrast of this headline to the paragraph which preceded it, arrested Sir Richard Gaunt's attention, and he read the half-playful, half-enthusiastic words of the journalist who had obtained an interview with "The richest man in world."

"Mr. Harry K. Lampirthy," wrote the reporter, "is the richest man in the world. At least, he says so, and he ought to know. He has just arrived in London, and has taken half the Carlton Hotel. His private cook has a motor-car of his own. His valet is sleeping in a room that was occupied last week by one of England's proudest nobles.

"In the course of a conversation, which lasted for seventy-five seconds, or nearly a quarter of a minute longer than Mr. Lampirthy usually accords to interviewers, we gathered that the richest man in the world finds life a burden almost too hard to be borne, that he yearns for the simple life, that he hates public libraries, and charities of all kinds. We suggested an obvious remedy, and that closed the interview, which was meteoric in its brevity and brilliance.

"His first secretary, however, who has the salary of a Prime Minister, told us that he puts a thousand begging letters in the waste-paper basket every day."

Sir Richard Gaunt's lips tightened, as he read these few words of the irresponsible retailer of interesting rubbish. This man Lampirthy was the fastest runner in a race for which the whole world had entered. He was the strongest man in a contest which was waged through every minute of time in almost every quarter of the globe. He had come out on top. He had more power for good and evil than any emperor or president or king. He was the apotheosis of the gospel of wealth.

And yet he was not happy, and he found life a burden to him. This was probably true, in spite of the allowance that had to be made for the pose which millionaires assume before representatives of the Press. The very rich men find pleasure in shouting about the evils of riches. But, in spite of this theatrical attitude, there is bound to be an element of truth in their repeated denunciation of wealth. The child, who eats too many sweets, is sure to feel sick.

Private appeals for help and requests for subscriptions to charities would fail to touch the heart of a man like Lampirthy. He would be doubtful of the value of his gifts, he would look on them as a mere tax exacted from a man in his position. The result, too, would be indefinite. The money, directed into a thousand channels, would do little more than swell the current which flowed through each. And, when the man died, there would be nothing to point to as the single-handed accomplishment of a single great worker.

But if such a man were given the chance of regenerating the whole of his country, of equipping a vast crusade against the evil which was threatening to destroy the soul of a nation, of overthrowing the god of wealth and beating

the image into dust, would he not be inclined to take it? Whether he succeeded or failed, his name would be carved for all time on the history of the world. Even if his heart was not in the work, the scheme might appeal to him. It would gratify his desire for fame, his lust for power, his longing to be something greater than the "richest man in the world."

And in that mean little back room, as poor a scene as could be imagined for the birth of an idea that might regenerate the world, Sir Richard Gaunt sat with his chin on his hands and wondered how far it would be lawful to ask help of the Mammon of Unrighteousness.

After a while he rose to his feet and paced up and down the room, his dark eyes alight with eagerness, his thin, muscular body aglow with the desire for action.

The poor man suffered because he could not get what he wanted. The rich man because he had got all that he wanted. The two extremes met in a common bond of unhappiness. Neither had any worthy object in life, any pleasure that was independent of all external circumstances. It is the hideous decree of the Money God that those who serve him shall serve him alone, whether they succeed or fail, whether they struggle for a mere pittance or whether they are the possessors of millions. There is no room for anything else in their hearts.

These thoughts stung Sir Richard Gaunt to fierce enthusiasm. If he could only shatter this idol, if he could break down the whole social system, in which every one takes his place according to his financial position, if he could give rich and poor something that neither wealth nor poverty could destroy, something which would make them secure against all the chances of fortune, if he could only do this, he would bring happiness into the world.

He knew that only one power would bring about so stupendous a result, and that was the power of religion.

This alone could raise men above all the accidents of birth and shield them from all the blows of circumstance.

The bitter irony of the whole situation lay in the fact that two things were absolutely necessary for the work that lay before him, and both were in themselves mean and despicable. The first was money, and the second was self-advertisement.

A new movement can only be started by attracting attention. Even the appearance in a police court was a means to an end.

The movement can only be carried on by money, whether in the shape of chance subscriptions or solid financial support.

And Harry K. Lampirthy was the richest man in the world.

III

THE RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD

MR. HARRY KINBOLT LAMPIRTHY was "not at home" to anyone.

He was comfortably ensconced in a large arm-chair before a blazing fire. He gripped a briarwood pipe in his teeth, and puffed out clouds of smoke across the handsomely furnished room. The tobacco was strong, and the scent of it was sure to cling to the curtains for many days.

Mr. Lampirthy was the most finished example of a type which is entirely the product of the modern commercial spirit. He was no happier than the white-faced toiler in the East End. Both were entangled in the same remorseless machinery which crushes out all that is best in human nature. The life-blood had been squeezed from their hearts; nerve, brain, and body had been cruelly injured. The one had only asked for the bare necessities of life, the other for all the wealth that he could lay hands on. But the result had been the same. Both had been granted existence, but nothing which might make existence endurable. The one had no time for pleasure, the other found no pleasure in anything. It was impossible to say that the millionaire was the happier of the two.

At the age of forty-seven Harry Lampirthy was an old man. His face was lined and furrowed with care. He was almost bald, and the tufts of hair by his ears were a dirty white. His body seemed all nerves and bones. He started at the fall of a coal in the grate. He was the richest man in the world, but he had worn out body,

heart, and brain in the struggle for that "bad eminence."

Millionaires are popularly supposed to be troubled by the possession of great wealth. But it is not that which troubles them. It is the getting of it which is the constant anxiety. For it is the peculiar curse of these men that they are forbidden to rest, that the desire for more gold becomes a disease, that they are bound to go on working until they die. There is nothing left for them in life but the piling up of one million on the top of another. It is indeed the only thing that keeps them alive.

Some men can start a new life in directing the fortunes of their children. But Harry Lampirthy was denied this blessing. He was childless. A little stepdaughter, the child of his wife by a former husband, was the ultimate heir to the Lampirthy millions. She promised to be as vain and empty-headed as her mother.

The great millionaire stared at the fire, and wondered whether he would ever be able to find in life some absorbing interest which would destroy and take the place of a desire for more money. He was tired of everything. Neither art nor literature appealed to him. Mere bodily pleasures had no attraction for the man who could purchase anything he desired. He had not even a craving for self-advertisement. He had made up his mind that the giving of money for charitable purposes was not at all satisfactory.

"Charity," he once said to a bishop in reply to a request for money, "is all very well for the giver, if it makes him feel pleased with himself. But it doesn't have that effect on me. I feel that the money is wasted. It will not remove, and will scarcely alleviate, the poverty and misery which are inseparable parts of our social system. Bring me a scheme which will strike at the root of the whole evil, which will alter the system itself, and

I will listen to you. The transference of money from the rich to the poor is but the tossing to and fro of a ball. It all comes back to us again, every cent of it."

"Yet the mere holding of the ball for a little while," the prelate had replied, "may bring happiness."

"Illusory, vain, useless. It does no real good. It only makes it all the harder to throw it back again."

Such were Mr. Lampirthy's views on charity, and, as he sat before the fire and gazed at the red-hot coals, he saw no opening for his energies in the field of charity. He knew that he could endow all the charities in England, but the giving of the money would afford him no pleasure, and could not in any way take the place of the desire for more wealth which was still the ruling passion of his life.

After a while he rose to his feet and rang the bell.

"Please tell Mr. Dixon that I wish to see him," he said, as a man-servant entered.

In less than a minute Mr. Dixon, first secretary and confidential manager of Mr. Lampirthy's business affairs, entered the room. He opened the door swiftly and silently, as though to show his eagerness. And he closed it softly, as though he were in a church. He was a young man of about twenty-eight, keen and alert as a hawk, pitiless and cruel as the oldest fighter in the great arena of finance.

"Sit down, Dixon, and take a cigar," said Mr. Lampirthy. The young man sat down, but he refused the offer of anything to smoke.

"How's the big job?" asked Mr. Lampirthy, after a short pause.

"I've bought fifty more paper-mills on the terms you instructed me to offer."

"Good. Are any standing out?"

"Yes, sir. Some are standing out for higher terms. Shall I bring you their letters?"

"No, not now. That can all be arranged. What of the others?"

"A few won't sell at any price."

"Is that so?" Mr. Lampirthy smiled.

"One of them was very rude."

"Who was that?"

"Purl and Stanton."

"Good. I will remember. Who are the others?"

The secretary reeled off a list of names, and Mr. Lampirthy seemed to be making a mental note of them.

"They don't matter," said the millionaire. "We'll ruin them, undersell them till they'll be glad to get rid of their mills at any price. That will be easy enough. What percentage of the trade is certain?"

"About ninety-four per cent."

"That is good. But, of course, we are offering exceptional terms."

"There will be only three per cent. on most of the money."

"Oh, well, Dixon, we shall soon be able to improve on that. Of course, none of them know with whom they are dealing?"

"Oh, no, sir, of course not. We've a dozen nominees."

"That's good—that's very good. When this is through, Dixon, you'd better take a holiday. I'd go to Madeira, if I were you. It's sunny and pleasant at this time of the year."

Then the door suddenly burst open, and a slip of a girl, cloaked to the eyes with costly sables, danced into the room, clapping her hands with childish glee.

"Papa, papa!" she cried. "Look at my new motor-coat! Isn't it beautiful?"

The little girl paused in an attitude which would have been called theatrical in a woman. Both men looked at her, but the expression on their faces was very different.

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Gus Dixon thought he had never seen anything more beautiful than the flushed, flower-like face of this child.

Mr. Lampirthy, on the other hand, regarded his step-daughter with a glare of disapproval. The price of the new coat was nothing to him, and he never gave it a thought. But he was annoyed at the look of pleasure in the child's face. It was unnatural, according to his ideas of how children ought to behave. His face was like an ugly mask, as he looked on a picture that would have delighted the eyes of an artist.

"Sibyl," he said quietly, "how often have I told you not to rush into the room like a mad dog?"

The child looked at him, and her lips quivered with vexation. Then she moved swiftly to his side and leant over him.

"I'm so sorry, papa," and she kissed him lightly on the forehead.

"Ah, Miss Sibyl," said Dixon, "you know how to manage men already."

Mr. Lampirthy frowned. "I think you'd better write those letters now, Dixon," he said coldly. "You'll miss the country post."

Gus Dixon said nothing, but left the room with a shrug of the shoulders and a smile.

When he had gone, little Sibyl Lampirthy sat down on the arm of her stepfather's chair, and nestled herself against his bony shoulder.

"You're cross, papa," she said plaintively.

"Not cross, Sibyl, but tired."

"Are you always tired, papa? Mother says you are."

The man did not answer, and the little girl looked wistfully at his stern face.

"You haven't said that you like my coat yet," she persisted. "I don't believe you've looked at it."

"It's nice and warm," he replied apathetically.

"Oh, papa, is that all you've got to say about it? Why,

lots of coats that only cost twenty pounds are nice and warm. This cost one hundred and fifty pounds. It's real Russian sable. I think mother's a dear to have bought it for me."

"Take it off at once," said the millionaire coldly. "It's not meant to wear in the house; and I think I've told you, Sibyl, that it's very vulgar to talk about what your clothes cost. Where is your mother?"

"In the hall," the girl replied sulkily. She rose from the arm of the chair and walked slowly towards the door. Her sweet little face was hot with anger.

Just as she reached the door, however, Mrs. Lampirthy entered, caught her in her arms, and kissed her affectionately.

"Look, Harry," she cried eagerly, "doesn't Sibyl look a little darling? Isn't she a sweet, fluffy little pet in this coat?"

Mr. Lampirthy did not turn his head to look at his "fluffy little pet." Sibyl freed herself from her mother's embrace and left the room. And when she reached her own bedroom, she took off the fur coat and flung it angrily into a corner.

"What's the matter, Harry?" asked Mrs. Lampirthy, when the child had left the room.

"You're making a fool of that child," he replied, without looking round at his wife. "She's got all the airs and vanities of a grown-up woman. She'll be insufferable in another year or two. I've half a mind to send her to a boarding school in France, some place where all the pupils wear black calico and have their hair done up in pigtails."

"I wouldn't let her go," said Mrs. Lampirthy, settling herself down in a chair by the fire. "How can you be so cruel, Harry?"

Mrs. Lampirthy's face grew tearful, as she thought of the possibility of a separation from her daughter.

It was the face of a shallow, worldly woman, only redeemed by the expression in the eyes. The whole face laughed through life, as a butterfly flits through a garden. But the eyes never laughed. They were deep, serious, and even clouded with the memory of some time that ought to be forgotten. Perhaps Mrs. Lampirthy remembered the hard days when she was the wife of a working man who earned five dollars a week.

"I suppose it's no good asking you about Sibyl's motor-car while you're in this beast of a temper?" she said.

"Sibyl's motor-car?"

"Yes. She wants a little car of her very own, with a man to take orders from her. We saw such a sweet little car to-day. It only cost——"

"What does the cost matter?" he exclaimed angrily. "You know that you and Sibyl can have whatever you want to buy. That's the curse of this life. We'd appreciate things more if we had to save up, to stint ourselves, in order to get something that we wanted. Buy the motor-car, buy twenty motor-cars if you like, but don't worry me about it."

He rose to his feet and stalked out of the room, banging the door behind him.

When he had gone, Mrs. Lampirthy reseated herself in the arm-chair and picked up an evening paper from the floor. She hurriedly glanced at the news, and then turned to the advertisements.

Her eyes lingered over one which headed the "Personal" column, and which had been there for the last five years.

"Violet Hexamer.—If this lady will communicate with Messrs. John Sarl and Son, 22a Lincoln's Inn Fields, she will hear of something to her advantage. Any one giving such information as will lead to the proof of this lady's death or the discovery of her present residence will receive £200 reward."

She looked at the words for two or three minutes, and

then she laughed. But there was no laughter in the large grey eyes.

Then she idly turned over the pages of the paper, and her attention was arrested by the following paragraph:

"A WINDFALL FOR CHARITY.

"Every day for the last five years the same advertisement has appeared in all the leading papers in England. Our representative called to-day on the old-established firm of solicitors who are responsible for the insertion of this advertisement. We are authorized to state that it will appear only for another fortnight, and that, if the missing lady is not found by twelve o'clock noon on December the 29th, a large sum of money left to this lady by her half-brother, the late Mr. George Crawshay, will be, under the terms of the will, applied to charitable purposes. Our representative inspected the will at Somerset House, and it is pretty certain that a deserving charity will benefit to the extent of nearly half a million pounds."

"Half a million pounds!" said Mrs. Lampirthy to herself. "H'm! That is about Harry's income for one month."

IV

AN APPEAL TO MAMMON

ONE evening towards the end of January Sir Richard Gaunt took out a small pile of coins from his pocket and counted them carefully. There were nine pennies, four halfpennies, a shilling, and two sixpences—two and elevenpence in all. He owed a week's rent, and there was only a piece of dry crust lying on the window-sill. For twelve hours he had not tasted food. He did not know how long that little store of money might have to last him. And, besides, he owed every penny of it.

His campaign had so far resulted in nothing but ridicule. He had achieved a certain notoriety, but of a kind that did not lend dignity to any cause. His name, Father Francis, by which he was known to the world, had figured more than once in the police news. He was known as a disturber of the peace, as a harmless Anarchist, as one who would upset all the comfortable laws and conventions of society.

If he had confined his fervent speeches to Hyde Park on Sundays he would not have placed himself in the grasp of the law. But he was too proud and ardent to be content with this. Hyde Park was the playground of people who were tolerated because of their incapacity. Blood, fire, and ruin streamed out from the lips of these orators, and the law laughed because it knew that nothing would follow, because it was well assured that no single speech would ever induce the mob of London to rise up and sack the mansions in Grosvenor Square, or blow up the Houses of Parliament, or assassinate the King.

Father Francis did not wish to be identified with these

harmless failures. He went to the other extreme and chose the most inconvenient and inopportune places for his denunciation of society. In a crowded thoroughfare, outside the door of a theatre disgorging its vapid crowd of pleasure-seekers, among the weary watchers by the gates of the docks, in a railway station crammed with people going to some popular race-meeting—these were the sort of places he chose for the deliverance of his message. The result was inevitable. He was always figuring in the police courts, and though he was generally let off with a caution, he once received a week's imprisonment. The crowning indignity came in the form of a decree that the state of his mind should be inquired into. The inquiry proved him to be a man of sound intellect, but the doctor, who was an honest man, told him that religion would affect his brain if he continued to harp on it so incessantly.

"FATHER FRANCIS AGAIN"

So ran the title of the paragraph which described his last conflict with the law. The phrase jarred on his sensitive nature. It was an insult to the name he had assumed. In a public library he had read the story of St. Francis of Assisi. It had seemed to be in some way analogous to his own. St. Francis had been a youth of vicious and profligate habits. He had suddenly been roused to a sense of his own sins, and been shown, by an extraordinary miracle, that there was divine work to be done in the world. Sir Richard Gaunt had assumed the title in all humility, and had prayed that his own work might prosper under the ægis of so great a name.

Yet what had been the result? He had only brought the name into contempt and ridicule.

Nothing could be done without money. The methods of primitive times were useless for an age of high civilization. The machinery of the social system clanged in the

ears of the idealist. Nothing could be done without money. Where was the money to come from? That was the question of the hour.

The man shrank from all public appeal to charity. Such a course would be detrimental to the cause. It would arouse suspicions in the minds of the givers. The battle was to be waged against the universal worship of gold. It would hardly be wise to solicit alms in the street.

The money would have to come from some private source, from a man who would understand the motive which prompted the request for it. It is easy to explain things quietly to a single individual, but very difficult to bring them clearly before the minds of a crowd.

His thoughts once more turned to Mr. Harry Lampirthy, the richest man in the world, the man whose life was said to be a burden to him. Some weeks previously it had occurred to him to try and show this man that there was still something worth doing in the world. But after due deliberation he had shrunk from making an appeal in a quarter where it would be so hard to find sympathy. He had realized how many thousands of people had been ruined to build up that colossal fortune. He knew something of the life of the man, the hard cruelty of his mind, the brutal strength of his will, the fierce lust of his heart for gold. Such a man was hardly likely to sympathize with the dreams of an idealist.

But now, as he was brought face to face with starvation and the entire destruction of all his hopes, he began to wonder whether it was not his duty to approach the owner of this huge fortune, and whether, after all, there was not something desirable in the hopelessness of the task.

And, as he thought of the battle that he would have to fight, his eyes flashed, and his lips tightened. It would be a contest worthy of his cause. If he won, the whole

world would be affected by the victory. If he lost, no one would suffer.

So far the result of his labours had been practically nil, and beyond the fact that he had obtained a certain advertisement, and that his face and views were becoming familiar to the people of London, he might just as well have stayed in the deserts of Arabia. A few kind-hearted men had offered alms, jumping at once to the conclusion that he was on the lookout for money. A few of the lowest class of idlers had tried to "pal up" to him, and expressed their willingness to help his cause, if it was made worth their while. But that was all. So far he had failed, but he felt that he had not been given a fair chance.

The meeting with Lampirthy, however, would be a reasonable test of his abilities. He would encounter a man whose whole life had been devoted to the acquisition of a huge fortune. He would not have to point out to him the vanity of earthly riches, for from all accounts the man had realized that already. But he would have to show him that there is a work to be done in the world worthy of the highest intellect, and which could only be done by a man of immense wealth.

This would be a battle worth fighting. The opponent would be no mere passer-by in a crowded street, but a man of strong will, keen intellect, and stupendous faith in himself. Harry Lampirthy represented the very eyes and brains of the idol which was to be destroyed. If this victory could be won, it might mean the conquest of England. He realized that it would be hard to get speech of the great millionaire. These kings of finance are as inaccessible as royalty. They are hedged in by a cordon of secretaries, who are paid to act as buffers between the outer world and their master. Yet, where reporters had succeeded, it was incredible that a man inspired by a strong and earnest purpose should fail.

When once the interview was granted, half the battle would be won. Face to face with the man, Sir Richard Gaunt felt that he would be given power to achieve a victory. But the interview itself would have to be obtained by other means than eloquence or the strength of a righteous cause. It might even have to be obtained by trickery, by subterfuge, by the employment of means which would be distasteful to him, which would be unworthy of the Master whom he wished to serve.

He sat in the darkened room before the fireless grate and considered the matter. It seemed cold and cheerless as the room itself. And the man felt that he had dropped from the sunlit heights of religious enthusiasm to the sordid gloom of a city on the plain. There was nothing fine or noble in his thoughts. He had to plot and plan like any beggar who is seeking charity.

He saw that it would be useless for him to call at the "Carlton," as he would only be turned away from the door. A letter would probably be ineffectual. It would be opened by the secretary, and thrown in the waste-paper basket. He remembered that Mr. Lampirthy received a thousand letters a day.

Yet the attack might well be opened by a letter. It would have to be framed in such a way that it would excite curiosity, that it would not suggest an appeal for help in any form. Such a letter might reach its destination. The secretary might be puzzled by its contents, and it might reach the eyes of the millionaire.

He rose to his feet and lit a small piece of candle. Then he went to an old sugar box in the corner and took out a large envelope, which contained note-paper. The paper was expensive and of good quality. He had not grudged the few extra pence which it had cost him. He knew the value of good stationery in letters of importance. Then he found a pen and a small bottle of ink,

and, seating himself on the floor, he used his wooden box as a table, and commenced to write:

“223 DARTFORD ROAD, BERMONDSEY, S.E.”

He paused and frowned at the address. It suggested an application for money, and yet he could not very well give any other if he wished to receive a reply.

“Dear sir,” he continued, “I have heard that you are the richest man in the world. If you would care to become the possessor of a wealth, which it is impossible to estimate, would you grant me the favour of an interview?”

He looked at the words critically. Then in an instant he saw how the recipient of the letter would receive them. They were merely the words of a financial tout, bringing forward a new scheme, trying to interest the millionaire in a new company that had not yet been formed.

He tore the paper into a dozen pieces and took a clean sheet.

“Dear sir,” he began again. “True happiness does not consist in wealth. I have discovered a happiness which is independent of wealth or poverty, which may be possessed by the rich and poor alike. Will you grant me an interview?”

He looked at this for some time, and studied the effect of every word. It was better than the other, and was yet far from being satisfactory. It suggested an appeal of some sort, either for the welfare of Mr. Lam-pirthy's soul or else for funds in the aid of some good work.

“I am not going to ask for a subscription to any charity,” he added, “nor am I going to talk to you about the state of your soul, of which I know nothing.”

He regarded this codicil as more satisfactory. It would at least make the recipient wonder what the writer did want.

Then he read the letter through from beginning to end, and paused, pen in hand, over the signature.

"Father Francis" might convey nothing to the reader's mind, or it might, if he read the papers carefully, convey the prospect of an interview with a religious maniac. An anonymous letter would arouse suspicions. A false name would introduce an element of deceit which might subsequently ruin everything. "Richard Gaunt" would convey nothing, and might even rise up as a witness against him in after-years.

Finally he decided on "Father Francis." He allowed the letter to dry, and then placed it in an envelope.

Then he addressed the envelope to "Harry Lampirthy, Esq., Carlton Hotel, S. W.," and labelled it "Private."

Through a mere oversight he omitted the initial of the second name.

This was a stroke of good fortune which might almost have been construed as the Divine approval of the affair. For Mr. Lampirthy had arranged with all his friends and relatives that they should address their letters to him in this fashion, and all letters so addressed were placed unopened in his hands.

All others, even those marked "Private," were read by Gus Dixon, and nine-tenths of them were never even brought to the notice of the millionaire.

V

THE SOLDIER

MR. LAMPIRTHY sat before the fire with a sheet of note-paper in his hand. There was a puzzled expression on his face as he read the letter carefully to the last word. Then he smiled and sent for his secretary.

"Dixon," he said, as that young gentleman entered the room, "you are supposed to know most things. Who is Father Francis?"

"A monk, I should think, sir, or perhaps a member of some semi-monastic order."

"In other words, you don't know who he is. Well go and find out. He lives at 223 Dartford Road, Bermondsey. Take a cab and find out all that is known about him."

"Now, at once, sir?"

"Yes, if you can. Anything further in the paper business this morning?"

"We're losing about a thousand pounds a day—under-selling. Those were your instructions."

"Any of 'em caved in yet?"

"Two more."

"Good. We'll break 'em all in presently. If you're not busy this morning run around and find out about this fellow. He seems a queer chap."

"Written to you, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes, you mixed the letter in with my private lot. No fault of yours. He left out the "K," just by chance, I suppose."

"Those sort of accidents do happen, sir. You remember I suggested to you the substitution of another initial for private letters."

"Yes, I believe you did. Bring me the correspondence on the paper deal. I'll look through it while you are away."

The secretary retired, brought in a thick budget of letters, and then went off on his errand. He was used to missions of this sort, which Mr. Lampirthy never entrusted to any one else. As a rule they meant business, but he could not guess what business the millionaire could have with the member of any religious order.

He returned a few minutes before lunch.

"Well?" said Mr. Lampirthy as the young man entered the room.

For reply the secretary handed him a copy of a newspaper. Mr. Lampirthy read a marked paragraph and smiled.

"Did you see him?" he asked.

"No, but I found out that he owes a week's rent."

"Poor, eh?"

"Yes, it's a wretched slum."

"Not the sort of place where one would expect to find much happiness, eh?"

Gus Dixon shrugged his shoulders.

"Not enough to turn his brain," he answered.

"A lunatic, eh?"

"Without doubt, sir."

"Well, drop him a line and say that I'll see him tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock. These madmen are sometimes worth meeting."

"I'd be careful, sir, if I were you. This fellow seems to be an Anarchist. He's got money on the brain, if he's none in his pocket."

"I can look after myself, Dixon. Drop him a line at once."

"Yes, sir," the secretary replied. "May I have the letter?" And he held out his hand.

"Father Francis, 223 Dartford Road, Bermondsey,"

said Mr. Lampirthy drily; and, leaning forward, he dropped the letter in the fire.

"It is quite private," he said by way of explanation. And Mr. Gus Dixon left the room.

The next morning Father Francis, attended by his usual retinue of gutter Arabs, arrived at the door of the "Carlton," and was immediately pounced on by a zealous policeman. The intervention of a hall porter, who had received instructions, and the production of Mr. Lampirthy's letter, removed this difficulty, and, amid the smiles of well-bred men and women, the enthusiast was ushered up the stairs to the apartments of the millionaire. His face was grim as he strode silently past the eyes of the idlers. His attitude was erect and dignified, and there was the light of battle in his eyes, the stern resolve of a man who has made up his mind to fight till his weapons break in his hand.

To the onlookers he was merely an object of curiosity. His long hair, his unkempt beard, his strange garb were only ridiculous. The general impression was that he had come from the East to sell trinkets.

He was shown into a room which Mr. Lampirthy reserved for his own particular use, and which was as nearly similar to a library as any room in an hotel could possibly hope to be. It was comparatively small, but comfortable, and almost homelike in its furniture. As he entered, Mr. Lampirthy half rose from his chair in front of a desk and bowed stiffly. Then he reseated himself, and Father Francis remained standing with folded arms and his chin sunk on his breast.

"A pose," said Mr. Lampirthy to himself, and then aloud: "Please take a seat, sir."

Father Francis seated himself on a small chair, looked at Mr. Lampirthy, and again folded his arms, as though waiting for the millionaire to speak.

"Your letter," said Mr. Lampirthy, "amused me,

aroused my curiosity. I suppose that is the effect you wanted to produce?"

Father Francis did not reply. His eyes were fixed on the ground, and he was apparently lost in thought.

"I wished to see the man who could write that sort of letter," continued the millionaire.

"Is that all?" was the reply. The tone of the man's voice expressed no disappointment, only incredulity. It was deep and earnest, and though the speaker did not lift his eyes from the ground, the man who heard the words, felt that the eyes were looking at him.

"No," said Mr. Lampirthy briskly, "that is not all. You have something to sell. What is it?"

"I have nothing to sell," the visitor replied. "Something to give—perhaps. Something to say, if you will listen to me."

"Say on. I will listen."

"They tell me that you are the richest man in the world," said the visitor, after a pause, in which his eyes scrutinized the face of the millionaire. "You represent in yourself the highest ideal, the highest ambition, of the present age. You are what all men would like to be. Are you happy?"

"Doubtless you have read all about that in the papers," replied Mr. Lampirthy, with a sneer.

"I can read it in your face," was the quiet reply. "Yet there are plenty of rich men who enjoy life. You are different, however; and the difference is all to your credit."

Mr. Lampirthy smiled. He was impervious to flattery.

"You are not unhappy because you are rich. You are unhappy because you are unsatisfied. You would be just as miserable if you were merely a well-to-do merchant, if you were a small shopkeeper, an artisan, a beggar. You would still be unsatisfied. You would feel that you were

made for something better, that there were things more to be desired than money."

Mr. Lampirthy did not answer. He was wondering what amount he would be asked for at the end of the interview.

"Your money," continued Father Francis, "is not a burden to you, but it is useless and of no benefit to the world. And the curse that has been laid upon you is this—that till you die you shall go on working like a slave and shall know the worthlessness of your labour."

A more serious look came into Mr. Lampirthy's eyes. He knew that the man was speaking the truth.

"I have heard all that before," he said wearily. "I get a thousand letters a day pointing out various ways in which I can relieve myself of my money."

"Yes, in charity. But that does not satisfy you. Your donations to charitable schemes, your endowments of hospitals, your gifts to individual and deserving sufferers—what are all these? Mere sops to appease your conscience, or else tithes exacted from you by society, or else advertisements of your benevolence. How can these satisfy you? You merely supply money which you can well spare. There is nothing in all this to satisfy a man of energy and character."

"There is, as you say, nothing satisfactory in all this, save for the recipients of the gifts."

"But if," continued Father Francis, "I were to put before you a scheme which was worthy of your talents and great possessions, which would occupy your mind to the exclusion of everything else, which would satisfy all the best promptings of heart and brain, which would appeal to you as a fighting man, which would, whether it succeeded or failed, place your name for all time among the greatest names in the history of the world, if I were to do this, and if I could persuade you to devote your wealth and energies to the accomplishment of a great, a

noble, and almost hopeless task, then, Mr. Lampirthy, you would know such happiness as is granted to few people in this sinful world."

The voice of the speaker had risen from the quiet monotone of a man making a business proposition to the earnest pleading of an enthusiast. The change produced an uncomfortable effect on the mind of the millionaire. He knew that he was in the presence of a man, whose whole heart was in the words he had spoken. He disliked emotion, and the change of voice irritated him.

"I am deeply grateful to you," he said, after a pause, "but may I ask why you are so anxious about my welfare?"

"I will tell you," the man replied quietly; "because it is only in this way that I can hope to appeal to you. To some men I should only speak of the greatness and nobility of the cause which I have at heart. I should rely on my power to move them by an appeal to all that is best in their nature. But you are a thoroughly selfish man, and I can only hope to move you by an appeal to your selfishness. You are unhappy, and I offer you happiness."

Mr. Lampirthy laughed. This speech pleased him more than the last. As a man of business he was attracted by the matter-of-fact candour of the words.

"There is something in this fellow after all," he said to himself, and then aloud: "What is this great and noble work which will buy me happiness?"

Father Francis rose to his feet, towering, threatening, militant.

"It is the shattering of an idol," he cried, "the image of a god who holds all the world in his cruel grip, who is squeezing out the life-blood from rich and poor alike—a god in whose temple you yourself are one of the most honoured worshippers. The name of the god is Mammon."

Mr. Lampirthy looked at the flashing eyes and the wild, earnest face with a glance of cold disapproval. The man's voice had quickened his blood, but had not touched his keen intellect. He had heard this sort of thing before in Hyde Park on a Sunday.

"You are a Socialist," he said coldly. "You think both riches and poverty are evils, and that there would be a sort of millennium if the money were taken away from the rich and divided among the poor."

"I do not think that," Father Francis replied, once more lowering his voice to the tone of a man who wishes to convince by argument rather than rhetoric. "In fact, I am sure that any scheme of that sort would be unsuccessful. At the best, it would be only a temporary relief of the present inequalities. The money would be poured out, but it would flow back again, as it always has flowed, to the men of strength and will and intellect.

"I think," continued Father Francis, "that you misunderstood my words, when I said that the god of Mammon must be destroyed. I was not thinking of the poor when I made the appeal. I was thinking of the whole social system, which is rapidly moving backwards with every advance of civilization. Money is the canker that is eating out all that is best in human nature. Society is advancing, and becoming more complex, but the individual is deteriorating. Most of the evils, and nearly all the unhappiness, in the world are due to the fact that the key to the whole system is money."

"That is a statement which requires proof."

"It lies round you wherever you turn your eyes to your fellow-men. Nine out of every ten people, I might say ninety-nine out of every hundred people, whether rich, poor, or of moderate means, spend most of their life in the pursuit of wealth, or of the bodily pleasures which wealth can purchase. Money is the main central

fact in their lives. All else revolves about it. And so long as that is the case, so long must there be unhappiness in the world."

"I do not see that," interposed Mr. Lampirthy.

"Do you not see that it is a great evil when men have nothing else to fall back on, nothing else on which to centre their thoughts? Do you not see that the poor man is miserable because he has not enough of the only thing he values? Do you not see that the man who is comfortably off is absolutely devoid of everything that can raise his brain and soul above the material nature of his daily wants and pleasures? Do you not see that the rich man—— Well, I need not speak to you of that. You know how much happiness wealth can bring a man of brains and energy and character. As for the life of the rich idler, it is beneath contempt."

"Money," replied Mr. Lampirthy, "is merely a means of exchange—an inseparable adjunct of social life—whether it be in the form of cheques or gold or seashells. It must always be important, because it is necessary."

"Important?" said Father Francis. "Yes, but not the most important thing in the world. Why should all else be sacrificed for it? Why should men lie, and cheat, and wear out their brains and bodies and souls in the desire to possess it? Very little of it will suffice for a life of comfort. What, after all, does a man want but food and clothes and a roof over his head, and time to devote himself to the betterment of his soul and intellect? But what do we find to be actually the case? Each generation requires more than the one which preceded it. The luxury of one is the necessity of the next, the self-denial of the one that follows. The world is sweeping on from one plane to another, from one standard to another. It thinks it is advancing, and so it is in luxury and civilization; but the men and women in it are slipping backwards. It is killing itself by inches. It will die of sheer ex-

haustion; it will wear out both the brain and body of the individuals in what it is pleased to call the March of Progress. Society has become a relentless machine, which crushes out all that should make life worth living. I do not know how you have attained your position, but I can guess that it has partly been through the ruin of other men, and that you have done much that you will not care to think about on your deathbed. Take the tradesman who sells adulterated goods, and calls it the custom of the trade; take the artist who paints popular pictures, the author who writes popular books, the musician who composes popular music, the lawyer who prolongs litigation, the labourer who shirks his work and robs his master of an hour every day, take even the lowest of all, and the most honest, in that he does not profess to be an honest man—the criminal—the common type of all—the man who steals.”

He paused, and his whole body quivered with emotion. His hands were clenched. His eyes glowed with the fire of enthusiasm. His very attitude breathed out destruction.

“Yes?” said Mr. Lampirthy softly.

“What is the evil genius of all these men? What has destroyed their honesty, has prostituted their art, has made them forgetful of their better selves? Only the desire for money—to be got honestly, if possible, but got at any price. This is the boasted result of all the centuries of civilization, and this alone. Men are no happier, nobler, purer, more unselfish, more artistic, more learned, save in science, than they were in the time of Julius Cæsar. They have railways, telephones, motor-cars, and all the various toys which science has contributed to the advancement of money-making and pleasure. But they have nothing else, and they have lost much. And the evil that is threatening the whole race with mental and moral destruction is the pursuit of money. But I have

sworn to God to destroy this idol, and by God's help I will!"

For a few moments there was silence. Father Francis stood erect as a soldier, and his face, haggard, wild, and unkempt, was clearly defined against the background of a pale blue wall-paper. The millionaire sat calmly in his chair, the embodiment of passive resistance.

"You are a dreamer," said Mr. Lampirthy, "an idealist. There is nothing practical in what you say. What do you propose to substitute for this force which is, I admit, all paramount in the modern social system? If you destroy, you must replace, rebuild."

"By the help of God, I will replace and rebuild," said Father Francis. "I will shatter the idol and set up the worship of the true God. There is only one force which is strong enough to combat this evil, and until recent years it has held its own. Not long ago it was more powerful than kings or parliaments or wealth. It was the one thing which men feared and honoured, and for which they were willing to give their lives and happiness. It is the belief in a God—you can call it religion, if you will."

"Religion!" snapped out Mr. Lampirthy. "There are many kinds of religion: even in Christianity—there are Catholics, and Anglicans, and Nonconformists; there is the Greek Church; and I believe the Salvation Army has done much good. Yet all have failed."

"Yes," replied Father Francis. "All have failed. But it was not always so. At one time the Church was a power second to none in the direction of human affairs. Then it became a tyrant. Then men rose against it and overthrew it. It is now a mumbled creed, a house divided against itself. In another hundred years it will be a ruin."

"And how do you propose to infuse life into this dying giant? How do you hope to succeed where so many good,

brilliant, and earnest men have failed? Are you better, more clever, more earnest?"

"God forbid that I should boast," Father Francis replied humbly, "but I have had much time for thought. For over three years I have been alone in the deserts of Arabia. My brain and body have been removed from all worldly influences. I have seen things clearly. My vision has been unclouded by the smoke and dust of modern life and modern forms of thought. At times I fancy I must have heard the voice of God. I have prayed, and I have seen the vision of a new world, in which religion is a living and actual force, in which all men's actions are determined by reference to the great standard set up for us by Christ, in which the central idea shall be that man cannot live by bread alone. That is the world which I saw in the silence of the wilderness."

"A dream," said Mr. Lampirthy kindly, "the world of a visionary, the Utopia which good men have always hoped for—but impossible in these days. You cannot put the clock of civilization back nearly two thousand years. The whole system will crush you. How do you propose to fight against the whole world?"

"I shall preach the Word of God," the enthusiast replied in a low voice, "the simple teachings of Christ which were meant to apply to everyday life. These doctrines have left their influence on all the world. They swung men's minds out of darkness into light; but now people are slipping back into darkness again—the darkness not of barbarism but of ultra-civilization. I intend to organize a great crusade, in which men of simple lives shall go through the length and breadth of England and preach the doctrine of simplicity and honour and truth. I shall endeavour to inspire these men with all there is in my own heart, make them see with my eyes, and hear with my ears. And these in turn shall light their torches, and put them to the fuel, and send the

blaze of enthusiasm through the country as a fire sweeps through the dry grass of a prairie. And England shall light up the world!"

"The fire will go out," said Mr. Lampirthy. "There is nothing new in all this. Religious revivals are common enough. They blaze up like fireworks, and all is darkness again. They are merely emotional outbursts, and experience has shown that the human mind cannot be kept at a high pitch of emotion for long."

"I am quite aware of that," answered Father Francis, "and I did not come here to waste my time and yours in trying to make you a convert to emotional religion. I am conscious of the defects in all revivals, and that is why I have come to ask for your help."

"You want money, eh?" said Mr. Lampirthy, with a shrewd glance of suspicion.

"Yes," was the quiet reply, "I want money—not mere thousands, but millions of pounds. I propose to fight the devil with his own weapons. But I want more than money, Mr. Lampirthy; I want a shrewd, practical business man, a great organizer, a comrade, who can fight the world on its own battlefield, who can deal with money to the best advantage, whose business capabilities are not clouded by emotion of any kind. In short, I want just the talents that have made you the richest man in the world."

"This sounds more practical," said Mr. Lampirthy, after a pause. "Yet what could I do with my money and business capacities in a work like this? I am not even a religious man."

Father Francis pulled forward a chair, and sat down by the desk in such a position that he faced the millionaire.

"You could do nothing," he said quietly, "without my help. And I can do nothing without yours. I am, perhaps, a dreamer of dreams, but I have the power to make people see the things that I have seen. I believe I can

stir their hearts. But I must do more than this. I must have a vast and costly organization which will water the seeds that I have sown. And the man who directs this must be a man of business. He need not even be a religious man, though I think he will become one after a little while. His heart must be in the work, but this need only be the result of self-interest. So long as the work is done well, it does not matter whether he labours from devotion to a noble cause, or whether he is only seeking relaxation, occupation, or self-advertisement. In time his nature will change. But at first—well, his motives do not matter. Many charities are supported by irreligious, by evil-living men. And God is served thereby."

Mr. Lampirthy's face grew hard and grim. It was the face of a fighter, of a man who wanted to do battle with any adversary that turned up. The stronger the foe, the more hopeless the prospect of victory, the better he would be pleased. Financial victories had become too tame and easy of late years. His wealth swamped all opposition.

"You are a clever man," he said, after a pause, "a lot cleverer than I took you for. Have you any definite scheme? How do you propose to make use of me? What will your scheme cost?"

"I have a definite scheme," Father Francis replied. "That is to say, definite in its broad outlines. The details are as yet indefinite, because it requires a man of business to settle them. I will give you the brief outlines of it, if the matter interests you."

He paused, as though waiting for an answer that might indicate Mr. Lampirthy's attitude, but the millionaire was not to be drawn.

"Let's have it as briefly as possible, and don't forget the financial part of it."

"I want five thousand men to preach the Word of God. These men will require the bare necessities of life. They will cost two hundred thousand pounds a year.

"Then I want to establish twenty thousand centres, which shall be both religious and social. There will be two teachers in each—men who are willing to devote their lives to the service of God. These must be strongholds from which it will be impossible to dislodge us. They must be our own property, and the houses must be built or purchased. The total cost of these establishments will be two million pounds a year. The capital sum will, however, be spread over a large number of years."

"I am glad to hear that," said Mr. Lampirthy drily.

"The life in these homes," continued Father Francis, "will be so ordered as to give an object lesson to rich and poor alike. The teachers will barely receive the wages of a labourer. Yet they will teach all men that it is possible to be happy and honest and clean with only the bare necessities of life, and their pleasures will be of the simplest. They will work hard, but they will show the dignity and not the burden of labour. They will devote half their time to the work of the society, the dissemination of our principles in their district. The other half they will employ in earning money at whatever trade or profession they have any ability for. This money will not go to increase their salary, but will be deducted from it. Every man, therefore, will not work for the possession of more money, but because he believes in the dignity of labour. Their earnings will materially reduce the yearly expenses, and in time these homes will be self-supporting."

"And what will these men do for the cause?" asked Mr. Lampirthy.

"They will further it by every means in their power. They will teach the young, they will go among both rich and poor. Both by precept and example they will try and show all men that money is not the aim and object of life. They will be men of all creeds, and will work hand in hand with all creeds. But, above all, they will

be earnest men, who will show that Christianity is not only concerned with our future but our present welfare, and that Christ meant it to be an active force in the world's everyday affairs. That is the broad outline of the scheme."

"The cost will be enormous."

"Yes; and there is more to be done than the establishment of these homes. We have to war with worldly weapons. Parliament must feel that we are a power. The law must be forced to punish the thousand crimes of dishonesty and impurity which are destroying the soul of the nation. Our principles must be made the principles of our rulers. The Press must be influenced."

"Ah, the Press!" said Mr. Lampirthy. "Yes; that would be a power worth conquering."

He leaned forward and picked up a bundle of papers, looked at some writing on the top document, and laid the packet down on the desk again.

"You interest me," he said quietly. "I think you are mad; but you interest me. The cost of your scheme is stupendous."

"It is a stupendous work," replied Father Francis, "yet it is one worthy of the greatest man in the world—the sort of work a man will like to think about when he is dying."

Mr. Lampirthy was silent, but his eyes were fixed on the bundle of papers, and there was a faint smile at the corners of his hard mouth. Father Francis bowed his head in his hands, and his lips moved in prayer.

Then the door opened and Mrs. Lampirthy appeared on the threshold.

VI

THE SWORD

FOR a moment the little fair-haired woman stood irresolute. There was a faint smile on the corners of her mouth as she looked at the man with the strange garb and long black hair. Then she came quickly forward to her husband's side.

"I'm so sorry, Harry," she said in a tone of apology. "I didn't know you were busy. If this gentleman will excuse me a moment——"

"My wife," said Mr. Lampirthy grimly. "Violet, this is Father Francis. You have heard of him."

The preacher rose to his feet and bowed awkwardly. He seemed conscious that the ordinary civilities of society were in ridiculous contrast to his appearance; but his dark eyes were fixed on the woman's face. The name, something in the tone of the voice, something, even, in the features, called up memories of the past which he had thrust aside and forgotten.

"I am pleased to meet you," said Mrs. Lampirthy in a tone which implied that she did not care whether she met him or not. "Will you excuse me one minute?"

"Well," asked the husband sharply, "what is it, Violet?"

"A man is round here from the Diche Canfort people about Sibyl's motor-car. She's worrying me to get a twenty-four horse-power motor-car. I thought sixteen horse-power would be enough for a child like her."

"Let her have what she likes," answered Mr. Lampirthy coldly.

At that moment Sibyl herself appeared on the scene. She had been listening behind the door for her father's

verdict. And she now ran into the room with all the impulsive rudeness of a spoilt child.

"Father," she cried eagerly, "it's such a beauty. Do let me have it." Then she caught sight of Father Francis, and her cheeks flushed. She paused, as charming a picture of wilful innocence as has ever been conceived by an artist. Her sweet little face glowed with excitement, but there was a frightened look in her eyes as she met the stern gaze of the strange man.

"Sibyl," said Mr. Lampirthy quietly, "you know that you are not allowed in this room at all. You can have the car—any car you like. But you mustn't rush in here like a—like a street Arab."

For reply the little girl dashed at her father and threw her arms round his neck. Then, remembering the presence of a stranger, her lips shrank timidly from Mr. Lampirthy's face, and the kiss, which she would have given from sheer gratitude and childish joy, was not pressed upon his cheek.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she cried, and fled out of the room, as though some one were pursuing her. Mr. Lampirthy smiled, but the keen eyes of Father Francis were still fixed on Mrs. Lampirthy's face.

"Is that all, Violet?" said Mr. Lampirthy in a tone that she could not pretend to misunderstand.

"Yes, Harry, that's all. Lunch will be ready in twenty minutes. If this gentleman will honour us——" and she stopped with a smile that was half an invitation and half an insult.

"No, thank you," said Father Francis quietly. "No, thank you very much. I must leave here in a few minutes."

He was half-starved for want of food, but the look on the woman's face forbade any possible acceptance of the invitation. She evidently regarded him as a curiosity, something which might amuse her by uncouth habits and

ridiculous mistakes in the way he ate his food. He remembered that at one time society ladies had made a great pet of an intelligent ape. He had no wish to be exhibited as a quaint specimen of humanity.

Mrs. Lampirthy bowed and left the room. For a few moments neither of the men spoke. The intrusion of this worldly little woman had broken in upon their thoughts, and brought them both down to the contemplation of more trivial matters. It was impossible to take up the thread in a few seconds. Mr. Lampirthy frowned and seemed to be trying to forget about Sibyl's motor-car.

Father Francis folded his arms and appeared to be trying to recollect something. The face and voice of the woman had stirred up unpleasant memories, but it was not of the woman that he was thinking at that particular moment. The child had, for some obscure reason, brought back to his mind the ugly white front of Gaunt Royal and the slate cliffs of Cardiganshire. He could not trace the connection in his mind. But it existed, and its existence troubled him more than a chance resemblance between two women.

Mr. Lampirthy was the first to speak. He broke in upon the silence with an ordinary apology.

"I'm sorry for the interruption," he said quietly. "But, as you know, when one is married—women, of course, do not understand."

Father Francis did not lift his eyes to the speaker's face. He was thinking of his mother, and life at Gaunt Royal, and Lady Betty Drake. Mr. Lampirthy frowned. His apologies were not usually received with this indifference, especially when they were made to any one who was asking his assistance.

"I beg your pardon," said Father Francis, after a pause. "I was thinking of your little girl. How beautiful she is! There is something in life which money cannot destroy."

Mr. Lampirthy laughed bitterly.

"How old is she?" continued Father Francis. "Has she ever been in Wales?"

Mr. Lampirthy looked at him as though desirous of tracing the reason of this peculiar question.

"She is fourteen," he replied stiffly, "and she has never been in Wales. She is not my child, only my stepdaughter. But the curse of my wealth is on her. She is, as you say, beautiful. And one day she will be the richest woman in the world. In your opinion, and perhaps in mine as well, the combination of wealth and loveliness will not tend to her advantage."

"She is but a child," said Father Francis softly. "Her mind is wax, and receives the impressions of her surroundings. It is curious that I should fancy I had seen her before. Of course, I have not."

"Of course not, if you've just come from the deserts of Arabia. Now let us talk business."

A gleam of hope came into the eyes of the enthusiast, and all thought of the child passed from his mind.

"Business?" he queried. "Yes, Mr. Lampirthy, I must apologize for the interruption. Only one thing occupies my mind. I have stated my case. You think it is worthless, and the mere vision of a dreamer. Yet some of the greatest things in the world have first come to men in visions."

"You are a dreamer," replied Mr. Lampirthy, picking up a piece of paper and a pencil. "I am not sure that you are not mad. Your mind is the exact antithesis of my own, for with me everything resolves itself into a question of pounds, shillings, and pence, and I am, of course, a practical man. But I will confess to you that your words have not been altogether wasted. They have touched a weak spot in my armour. I have always had the desire to attempt something which has never yet been attempted, something in which I can pit all my wealth

and energy against an almost insuperable obstacle. Many ideas have occurred to me from time to time, and I have put my back into the work, but in each case they have been matters of finance, and the victory has been too easy. Here you offer me a fresh field for my talents. And that seems to me the only merit in anything you have said."

He paused, and carefully selecting another cigar from his case, he lit it, and scrutinized the face of the dreamer. Father Francis did not speak, but his whole face and body was eloquent. The crucial moment had come, and his whole future work, and perhaps the future happiness of the world, depended on the man who faced him, quietly smoking a cigar. The tensivity of the occasion was shown in every line of his features, in his eyes, in the pose of his limbs. But he did not dare to speak. A single word might destroy everything.

"Your scheme for the houses," continued Mr. Lam-pirthy, "does not appeal to me. It seems useless and visionary. I do not think they will do any good. I do not believe that you can find forty thousand men in England to undertake the work at starvation wages. I am sure that you will meet with the opposition of every kind of religious denomination. You called these houses both homes and fortresses. The latter title seems to me to be the more correct. They will appear in this light to the inhabitants of the towns and villages. They will provoke resentment and irritation, be rather a hindrance than a help to your cause. I think I can spend my money in a way which will be profitable to myself and which will incidentally further the cause you have at heart. I have told you that I want to pit all the force of my wealth against some great obstacle, to accomplish some almost hopeless task, to fight a battle which will occupy all my thoughts and be worthy of such brains as I have got."

He paused, and, stretching out his hand, took hold of a packet of papers and slowly untied the piece of red tape

which bound them together. Then he turned over the documents one by one, and, selecting several sheets of blue foolscap, opened them, and appeared lost in the study of their contents.

Father Francis sat motionless, and not a muscle of his face moved. But his dark eyes were fixed on the papers, and he only saw long columns of figures.

For five minutes there was silence, only broken by the rustle of the papers, as Mr. Lampirthy turned them over. The heart of Father Francis beat fast, and he began to experience a feeling of shame. He had appealed to this giant force of wealth for help, and apparently his appeal had not been in vain. But he was made to feel the humiliation of the whole business. His soul and brain were aglow with the fires of religious enthusiasm. His only desire was to further the cause of Christianity and make it a living force in the world. He was inspired with the noble fervour of a high ideal. But the man, on whose assistance everything depended, was merely reckoning up columns of figures and calculating what it would cost.

"I am now engaged," Mr. Lampirthy said, "on a scheme which will place in my hands the greatest power for good or evil that has ever been placed in the hands of any single man. I started it with the sole idea of making money. It is a purely financial scheme. I look for large profits."

He paused, and a cloud passed over the face of Father Francis. Why did this man insist on thrusting the sordid side of the matter in his face?

"Your words have not touched my heart," the millionaire continued with a smile, "but that casts no slur on your powers of logic or rhetoric. I have no heart. I have only a brain, which is eager for something worthy of it. You have supplied that 'something.' You have turned up at an opportune moment. I can so carry out my scheme that it will benefit both you and myself."

Again he paused, and Father Francis did not look at him. He had no wish to show the eagerness in his eyes.

"Of course," continued Mr. Lampirthy coldly, "what I am going to tell you will go no further. If it does, you had better go back to Arabia. You won't find the desert sand so hot for you as England."

"Of course, I shall say nothing," Father Francis interrupted haughtily, "of course not." He tried to control his voice, but the nails of his fingers left deep red marks on his palms.

"Well, then, I will let you know something about the scheme. These papers here"—and he touched the packet with his fingers—"deal with a matter which is going to cost me three times as much as your little scheme of 'houses' and 'fortresses.' And if I carry it out on lines which will help you as well as myself, I shall give you ten times as much assistance as you have ever dreamt of in your wildest dreams."

He paused, and opened out the sheets of blue foolscap.

"Yes, yes," cried Father Francis, rising to his feet. Then, as though ashamed of his lack of self-control, he sank back into his chair, and folded his arms and waited patiently.

"The great power of the country," continued Mr. Lampirthy, "is the Press. It directs public opinion; it guides parliaments; it has a voice in the conduct of kings; it can make war or peace; it is all-powerful. It is sneered at by the great, but they are all under its heel. In two months' time nearly all the Press of England—and, indeed, of the whole world—will be in the hands of one man."

"The Press of England—of the world? Impossible!" murmured Father Francis. "Even your wealth cannot buy it. It is incorruptible; it cannot be bought."

Mr. Lampirthy smiled.

"No," he said quietly, "it cannot be bought. It is not, as you say, incorruptible, but a large part of it cannot be bribed or corrupted. Unfortunately, however, the Press, great power though it is, depends on quite a material and purchasable commodity. Even the finest thoughts, the most unbiased views, the most splendid articles in support of any cause, have to be printed on ordinary and sometimes, I fear, very common paper."

"Of course," said Father Francis, "of course."

"Well, in two months' time I shall control the paper supply of the world."

"Yes, yes," said Father Francis eagerly. He was beginning to understand.

"Most of the newspapers will be dependent on me for their very existence. Some of them have their own mills, and will be independent; but the majority will have to buy their paper from me. If I choose to raise the price of paper a farthing a pound they will either be run at a loss or be swept out of existence. Do you understand?"

"It is wonderful," muttered Father Francis. "It is not human; it is devilish, this power that lies in the hands of a rich man."

"Yet if it were used for good, if I were to say to the newspaper proprietors: 'Here is a policy which is honest, which is Christian, which is going to purify the world and make men better and happier. Model the tone of your paper on these lines. Try and give the public something which will further the cause of religion and honesty and purity. Press home my ideas, however wild they may seem to you at first. Influence Parliament, the public, the whole of your great audience. Do this, and you shall have your paper at a price which will yield you a profit. Refuse to do it——'"

"No, no," cried Father Francis. "It is impossible. They will all set up mills of their own. The trees cover

millions of acre. Even you cannot buy the forests of the world. There is wood pulp to every one's hand."

"Yes, if they have the machinery and the mills. But these things cannot be put up in a day. Do you think that a paper can afford to stop circulation while it is putting up mills?"

"They will pay any price, run the paper at a loss till they are ready. They will pay any price."

"They shall not have it at any price," shouted Mr. Lampirthy, rising to his feet and bringing down his fist with a crash on the table. "If I refuse to give it them, they cannot have it at all."

Father Francis smiled triumphantly. He had conquered. The tense form, the eager face, the flashing eyes, the fierce words showed the enthusiasm of the speaker. Mr. Lampirthy had come out of his hard financial shell. For the moment he was a soldier willing to fight in a great cause, and ready to risk his fortune for the sake of Christianity. Was it possible that the words of the preacher had taken root, even in this stony ground?

Father Francis rose to his feet and stretched out his hands.

"Comrade," he said fervently, and the hands of the two men met across the desk on which lay the documents of the Great Paper Trust. Mr. Lampirthy's hand was thin and cold in the hot powerful grip of the other's fingers.

"My comrade," said the preacher in a low voice, "my fellow-worker in the greatest work that men have ever put their hands to. By God's help we will conquer the world. And, whatever we lose in the contest, we shall not lose in vain."

Mr. Lampirthy withdrew his hand. The momentary enthusiasm had died from his face, and he was once more the man of business.

"I intend to lose nothing," he said coldly. "There

will, of course, be a loss at first, but I shall get it all back, and the more I lose, the worse it will be for the newspapers afterwards. They may even have to charge a penny for the halfpenny ones."

His tone caused a sudden revulsion of feeling in the mind of the listener. The business side of the scheme had been forgotten for the moment, but it was now thrust forward with almost brutal candour. Could any real good come of such an unholy alliance as this? Could any union between a cold-blooded financier and a fervent preacher of the truth result in anything but failure? Father Francis stood irresolute, and the hand, which had been extended to seal the contract, was now clenched in anger.

"A man's heart must be in a work of this sort," he muttered. "I had hoped—but, no, I see how foolish I was. I am afraid, Mr. Lampirthy, I am afraid."

"Don't be a fool," said Mr. Lampirthy sharply. "My heart is in the business, and I intend to carry it through. I don't want to make money, but I don't intend to lose it. I like your idea, and shall give you all the help I can. You said yourself that the devil must be fought with his own weapons."

"Yes, yes," was the eager reply; "but have you the cause at heart? Do you really wish for a victory?"

"Of course, I do. My motives are nothing to you. But, when I put my hand to a thing, I only think of victory. And that is the first duty of a fighter. Great heavens, man, aren't you satisfied? It is not every crack-brained enthusiast who could have persuaded me to devote my money to the furtherance of his wild dreams. If you are wise, you will leave me now and let well alone. Otherwise I may use my power for another object. I have several other schemes which I should like to force on the Press of England."

"I will leave you," said Father Francis simply, "and

I give you thanks from my heart. And may God bless you and further our work."

He shook hands with the millionaire, and walked towards the door.

"One moment," said Mr. Lampirthy. Father Francis turned and waited. There was nothing servile in his attitude, though he had been recalled like a servant.

"The big scheme," continued the millionaire, "cannot possibly come off for two months, or more. And if you don't keep your mouth shut, it won't come off at all. But I must see you once a week, and talk over details with you. You must not come here, as your visits will attract too much attention."

He paused and looked at the man's strange garb and long hair. Father Francis understood, and bowed his head.

"You are quite right to dress like that," continued Mr. Lampirthy; "it is a good advertisement. But it will make your visits to this hotel undesirably conspicuous. I will call to see you every Friday afternoon at four o'clock. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"You can go on with your missionary business and preaching, and rake in as many converts as you can. You will want money. What do you consider the bare living wage?"

"Sixteen shillings a week."

Mr. Lampirthy unlocked a drawer and took out some bank-notes.

"Here are seventy-five pounds. That will keep you going for some time."

Father Francis frowned. He saw the trap that was being laid for him.

"I don't want seventy-five pounds," he said sternly, "not at present. There is only one man to pay, and that is myself. Give me sixteen shillings, and I will ask

you for the same sum every week. As to the future, I wish all payments to come from you, and to be properly checked. I do not intend to handle your money."

A faint flush came into the millionaire's sallow cheek, and he took sixteen shillings from his pocket.

"Here you are," he said, and laid the money on the table. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he rose to his feet, picked up the coins, and walked across the room to the man who was standing by the door. "Here you are," he repeated, and placed the money in Father Francis's hand. The simple action meant much. It was a sign that the preacher was henceforward to stand on an equal footing with the millionaire.

"God bless you," said Father Francis fervently; and Mr. Lampirthy understood.

"I should like a receipt," said the millionaire, "as our relations are to be those of men of business."

"Of course, of course," and Father Francis walked hurriedly over to the desk, sat down, and took a sheet of blank paper.

"Received of Harry Lampirthy, Esq., the sum of sixteen shillings.—Richard Gaunt."

In the hurry of the moment his real signature came naturally to his pen. Then, faced by the name which he had almost forgotten, he tore the paper into a dozen pieces, and threw them in the fire.

"Harry K. Lampirthy, is it not?" he said, by way of an explanation.

"Yes, but if you wish your letters to reach me without passing through the hands of my secretary, leave out the K. You did so in the one I received yesterday, and that is why you are here to-day. Gus Dixon would have thrown it into the waste-paper basket."

"It was the hand of God," said Father Francis. "It was the hand of God."

He wrote out the receipt, blotted it, and walked towards the door.

“God has brought us together,” he said fervently. “He has work for both of us in the world.”

He left the room, and Mr. Lampirthy returned to his desk, picked up the receipt, and studied the writing with a curious expression on his face. Then he looked in the grate, and found a small, three-cornered piece of paper. It bore the name of “Gaunt.” Half of the “G” was torn off, but the remainder was sufficient to indicate the letter.

Mr. Lampirthy placed the fragment in his pocketbook, and went to lunch.

A small grilled cutlet, a piece of dry toast, and a glass of water constituted his frugal meal. It almost seemed as though the words of Father Francis had filled him with a desire to lead the simple life. But, as a matter of fact, he was a martyr to dyspepsia, and could only eat the very plainest food.

VII

THE ENEMY WITHIN THE GATES

WHEN Father Francis reached Dartford Road it was nearly dark. He was worn out with want of food, and his long interview with the millionaire had strained his powers of body and mind to the utmost. But even on the way home the fierce ardour of his spirit flared up into words. Twice he stopped and spoke to the people—once in the Strand outside the offices of a well-known newspaper, and again in one of the East End slums. He poured out the vial of his wrath against the great city, where men went to and fro all day in their desire for money; he spoke of the nobler and the better life, in which all men should be content with little, and should think more of their minds and souls than of their bodies. In the first instance he was stopped by the police. In the second he was jeered at by a little band of unemployed.

“Stow yer jaw!” shouted one burly ruffian. “Go to them as ’as di’monds and kerridges; you ain’t no bloomin’ use here. Gawd don’t feed starvin’ men nowadays. And wot I sez is, we won’t ’ave ’Im at any price!”

As he climbed up the uncarpeted stairs to his bare, cheerless room, the words of this man still rang in his ears. What was he going to do for such as these? They were asking for bread, and what was he going to give them? A mere exhortation to be content with little? He remembered the words of Christ: “The poor you have with you always.”

But when he had closed the door, and lit the candle, his physical cravings for food drove all other thoughts from his mind. He took a loaf of new bread in his thin,

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muscular hands, and tore at it like a wild beast. The crust cracked in his strong white teeth. It was delicious—a food for men. When he had taken the edge off his appetite, he added the relish of a small piece of cheese. He washed the meal down with a glass of water.

When he had finished, his brain began to work. The meal itself suggested the idea to him. "It was delicious," he said to himself, "yet it only seemed so because I was starving. That is the central fact of existence. Every one is pleased with that which they cannot always get. Put the whole plan of social life on a lower level of comfort and luxury, and every one will be satisfied with very little."

He did not see another lesson, which he might have learnt. He did not ponder on the fact that the sight of food had driven all else from his mind, and that even the great cause was forgotten in the pleasures of a new loaf of bread. If he had done so, the incident might have struck fear into his heart. The body cries out for food, and, until the body is satisfied, all noble thoughts must go to the wall.

Gaunt's meditations were interrupted by a knock at the door. In response to his invitation to enter the landlady appeared with a lighted candle in her hand. Her thin white face looked ghoulish in the flickering light.

"What about the rent?" she croaked dismally.

He rose to his feet and held out three and sixpence in the palm of his hand. She took the money without a word of thanks, and then turned to leave the room. On the threshold, however, some kindly idea seemed to strike her.

"'Tis mortal cold 'ere," she groaned, "mortal cold."

"It is not warm," he answered.

"There's a bit of a fire downstairs, if you'd like to warm yer feet. The feet do get cold without a fire."

"No, thanks, Mrs. Hill. I am going out in a minute."

She looked at him in a manner that might have expressed pity in a face more adapted for the display of emotion.

"You'll be paying yer rent more reg'ler, maybe," she said, after a pause.

"I hope to do so."

"Got work, 'ave yer?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hill, I've got work."

"No more of this shoutin' and preachin' and 'owlin', as don't bring yer in a brass 'a'penny?"

"I hope to pay you regularly, Mrs. Hill."

She looked at him with cold, unseeing eyes.

"The folk in this street do larf at yer, Mr. Francis," she said, after a pause; "they larf somethin' cruel, and at me, for 'avin' yer in this 'ouse. But I sez to them strite, 'So long as 'e pays 'is rent,' that's wot I sez, 'So long as 'e pays 'is rent reg'ler.'"

Father Francis did not answer, but a faint smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"Good-night," said Mrs. Hill, and she closed the door behind her with a crash that rattled the window. He heard her steps creaking down the stairs.

In half an hour's time he went out into the streets, and continued the work that he had set himself to do. The result was not gratifying to an enthusiast. He was with difficulty rescued from a crowd of angry roughs by a policeman, and then from the hands of the law by the intervention of a kindly clergyman. His face had been cut by a stone, and there was a nasty bruise on his forehead. His limbs ached. He felt tired out in mind and body. When he regained the calm and shelter of his room he drank greedily from the water-jug. Then he opened a small pocket Bible and read it diligently.

The Bible was a comparatively new book to the man who had once been known as Sir Richard Gaunt. As a

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child he had been forced to read it, and a few texts and facts had remained in his memory, even in his darkest hours of sin and degradation.

When, in the wastes of the Arabian desert, he awoke to the possibilities of a new life, and when clean living, and pure air and solitude, and time for reflection, had worked a change in his brain and heart, he had no opportunity of studying the sacred book. All his plans for the future were founded on his own consciousness of what was right and wrong, and his thoughts only dwelt on the evils existing in the world and a possible remedy for them.

The first copy of the Bible came into his hands when he was working his way back to England on a tramp steamer. It belonged to a fellow stoker, who had, to use the man's own words, "got religion." The book was grimed with coal-dust, the cover and some of the outer pages were charred with fire. An angry atheist had once thrown it into the furnace, and had been laid up with a broken jaw for the rest of the voyage. The history of this little volume appealed to Sir Richard's imagination.

He had read it carefully, with all the joy and enthusiasm of one who makes his first acquaintance with a great book at an age when he is able to understand it.

The result was exactly as might have been expected. The man, whose sense of the true and beautiful had only just come into being, was entranced by the beauty and majesty of the greatest book in the world. Its words satisfied all the indefinite longings of his heart.

But, to-night, as he turned over its pages in the hope of finding some comfort, he failed to discover that for which he sought. He read several passages, which he had marked in pencil, but they only rose up in witness against him. There was the parable of the rich young man.

"Go, sell that thou hast and give to the poor." And then, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of

a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

And then the story of Dives and Lazarus, and so on, and so on. Every passage was marked, and every word seemed to accuse him. He had entered into a compact with the richest man in the world to overthrow the god of Riches.

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

That text seemed to be written in letters of flame. He closed the book, and fell upon his knees in prayer. "Give me strength, O God," he cried, "strength to conquer all the evil that I have to overcome. Give me guidance in my difficulties. Teach me the way that I must go."

Then, thoroughly exhausted with his mental and bodily conflict, he blew out the candle, and lay down on his rugs to sleep.

He wrapped the thin covering round him, and pressed his head on the unyielding pillow, but he could not sleep. The air round him seemed to chill his body, and the hard floor seemed like a slab of ice. His brain was still active and restless, and the events of the day were photographed clearly in the darkness.

He had achieved a great victory; he had enlisted a great power on his side; a tremendous battle loomed in the near future, in which one man was going to grip the whole Press in his hand and turn it against the worship of money and luxury and pleasure. Yet he was not content. He felt that he had sacrificed something in the desire to conquer. Yet what he had lost was intangible, and he could not give a name to it.

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." That was the text that echoed in his brain. He wondered if it were possible to make Mammon the servant of God.

And then a tender little face rose before his eyes, a flushed, beautiful little face framed in costly furs, wilful, yet fresh and innocent as a flower. And once more his

mind harked back to Gaunt Royal and the grim cliffs that faced the sea.

He could not understand the connection, and he concentrated all his mind upon this curious coincidence. Why should the face of the little girl have reminded him of his home in Wales?

And then slowly out of the darkness there rose the clear vision of a room, and a picture which hung upon the wall. It was a portrait of his aunt, Gladys Gaunt, painted by a local genius. She had always been reckoned one of the beauties of the family, and even at the age of fourteen she was thought worthy of being immortalized on canvas. He recalled the hideous dress of this early Victorian period, and the sweet, childish face, which had made even the dress seem beautiful.

And, as he remembered, he sprang to his feet and struck at the darkness with his hands, as though he were face to face with some enemy that he could not see.

What terror lurked there in the darkness? What vision more real and substantial than any of his dreams of a new world? What was it that he feared? Was it more than a phantom of his brain? Was he the victim of over-wrought nerves and a diseased imagination?

The face of a child, beautiful and innocent—a resemblance to a certain old picture which hung in one of the rooms at Gaunt Royal—that was all; nothing, surely, to strike fear into the heart of a man. Such coincidences were common enough. Nearly every portrait of the dead has its counterpart among the living. Besides, his Aunt Gladys had not been the possessor of a typical Gaunt face.

The man paced to and fro across the room in the darkness, fighting down the wild idea which had come into his mind. The simple coincidence might not have troubled him. But there was another fact which had to be considered. There was the woman herself, the mother of the

child by a former husband. Something in the woman's face and voice had reminded him of the past. But fifteen years work great changes, and there is little of the girl left in the worldly woman of thirty-three.

"It is monstrous, impossible!" he said to himself. "The betrayed woman sinks; she does not rise. She dies of shame and starvation; she does not become the wife of the richest man in the world. Besides, there was a former husband. Lampirthy would have satisfied himself of that; he is a practical man of the world. He would not give his name and fortune to a—it is a fancy of a madman."

He stopped, and pressed his hands over his eyes, as though to shut out what he saw in the darkness. And then he held his breath and listened. He fancied he heard a voice.

"May the dead rise up against me, and destroy me, if I do not keep my oath."

The words were faint, but very distinct. They sounded as if they were spoken a long way off through a megaphone.

And, as he listened to them, the atmosphere of the room seemed to become hot and stifling, and the darkness was heavy, like a sheet of lead. His heart beat furiously, and there was a singing in his ears. He gave a cry of fear, and, rushing to the window, threw it open, and breathed in the cold, fresh air.

"I am going mad," he cried, as he clasped his hands and looked up at the starlit sky. "I must be calm; I must pray. O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

The awful thought that his brain was giving way possessed him. He shivered as though stricken with ague; a cold sweat gathered on his forehead; his whole body cowered, as though he awaited some terrible blow. Was it possible that God was going to punish him with madness? Was all this religious enthusiasm only the mania

of a disordered brain? The laws of nature were inexorable; no repentance, no atonement, could prevail against them. Years of excess drain out both bodily and mental strength. In both the natural and spiritual world there is written the same remorseless decree.

“The wages of sin is death.”

All round him Gaunt saw the darkness and the lights of a great city, the city he was going to save from ruin. All these millions were to hear the truth. They were to be roused from their carnal sleep—rich, middle-class, and poor alike. He had been chosen as the bearer of the message. A great work lay before him, a work which would occupy his whole life. God had chosen him, unworthy instrument though he was. God would give both mind, body, and strength to do the work. And then—well, then the law of nature might run its course.

“It is the heart that moves me,” he muttered to himself, “not the brain, which is all too poor and weak for the task. My words are not the words of one who thinks, but of one who feels that they are true.”

This thought gave him some small comfort, and he clung to it in his agony of fear. But he could not forget that the old madness had returned to him. For years he had thrust aside all thought of George Crawshay and his oath. He had ascribed his former fears at Gaunt Royal to his way of living. But now, after years of a clean, manly, and wholesome life, the old terror had returned to him. It had been subdued, but it had not been destroyed.

“I must pray,” he said to himself, “this is but the scourge to whip me into the battle. I must find strength in prayer. I must thrust everything out of my mind save the work that I have set myself to do. O God, give me strength to do Thy will.”

He closed the window, lit the candle, and opening the Bible, read the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. The narrative appeared to give him some comfort. If

this scourge of Christianity had been moulded into one of the great champions of the faith, surely there was hope for a man who had merely lived a life of sin.

He shut the book and prayed for strength. At times his burning thoughts found vent in spoken words. Outside the door Mrs. Hill crouched and listened to what she believed to be the ravings of a madman. Then, tired and cold, she crept back to her bed and thanked Heaven that the rent was paid.

At last, when the man had exhausted himself in fervent prayer, he opened the Word of God at random. He often did this, as though seeking a chance inspiration. The "Sortes Virgilianes" appealed to him as a form of guidance.

The following was the text that caught his eye:

"The wages of sin is death."

He closed the book gently, blew out the candle, and once more lay down to sleep.

"Death let it be," he said quietly, "but not until my work is done."

And, thrusting everything else out of his mind, he pondered over the details of his great scheme until he fell asleep.

VIII

THE FIRST DISCIPLE

"WELL, child, what is it? You seem to be worrying about something."

"I've a headache, Lady Betty," the girl replied.

"Come, Alice, the truth. You've been like this all day. You're taking no interest in your work. I don't want to pry into your private affairs, but I want to impress upon you the wisdom of thrusting all private troubles out of your mind when you are working. That is one of the glories of work, Alice, that it helps us to forget."

The girl moved her pencil down a long line of figures. Then she suddenly put her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Lady Betty kindly. "I don't want to be inquisitive, but I do wish you to look on me more as a friend than as an employer. Have you had a quarrel? Well, that's nothing. He'll come round to you and make it up to-morrow."

The girl continued to cry and did not raise her head.

"Now then, Alice, this is all nonsense. Love is very sweet and important, but, after all, one's future depends on the work one does in the world."

"He's out of work," the girl exclaimed suddenly.

"Well, that doesn't matter. There's always plenty of work for an honest, steady young man. He was in Bland's International Stores, was he not? From all I've heard, he's well out of it."

"That's what he said last night," faltered the girl. "He gave notice to leave. He didn't like their ways. He told Mr. Bland he was a murderer."

"A murderer?" asked Lady Betty in some astonishment.

"Yes, for selling adulterated food."

Lady Betty smiled. "It was not wise of him to use such intemperate language," she replied, "but the action does him every credit. He'll easily get another place, and better wages."

"Not if Mr. Bland can stop it, Lady Betty, and he's well known and respected in the grocery trade. But it wouldn't matter if Mr. Bland wrote him out a testimonial in gold letters. He's not going to look for another place. He says the whole trade is tarred with the same brush."

"Oh, this is very foolish," said Lady Betty, "very unpractical. I must have a talk with him. How does he propose to earn his living?"

"I haven't told you the worst," said the girl, drying her eyes with a tiny handkerchief. "He's got religion."

"I'm afraid that won't earn him his daily bread," replied Lady Betty, with a look of disapproval.

"He's took up with this new preacher," the girl continued. "The night before last he made me go to one of the meetings on Hampstead Heath. The preacher frightened me, Lady Betty. I don't think I slept all last night."

"Is this the man who calls himself Father Francis?"

"Yes, Lady Betty. Oh, it was dreadful, Lady Betty. He made me feel really wicked. He went on awful about money. It made me feel as though I oughtn't to earn any more than would buy me bread and cheese. And I felt badly about that extra pound a week."

"I've heard of the man," said Lady Betty sternly, "a visionary, a dreamer. If only these fellows would shout less and do more practical good in the world——"

"I haven't told you the worst yet," the girl interrupted. "I'm ashamed to speak of it. I think Harry must have lost his head."

"What has he done?"

"I could have sunk through the ground, Lady Betty. When the preacher had finished, and was praying that God might move the people's hearts to a better kind of life, Harry suddenly waved his arms in the air and shouted like a madman. 'Here I am,' he cried, 'take me. Let me help you.' And, after the meeting was over, he went and talked to the man, and then he came back to me and told me he was going to give up the grocery trade and take to preaching. And he asked me to marry him at once, and start tramping round the country preaching like Father Francis himself."

"And begging for alms, I suppose, subscriptions to the cause. I know these fellows, Alice. Tell Harry I want to see him to-morrow at half-past two."

"There's to be no begging, Lady Betty. He's to have sixteen shillings a week, paid regularly on Fridays. He was getting thirty-four with Bland."

"What is this Father Francis like?" asked Lady Betty, after a pause. "Does he seem to be genuine?"

"It seems to me, Lady Betty, as though he were mad. He said the most awful things about everything. As for charity and good works, he laughed at them. He said that the only hope for England would come through a change in the minds of people, and not from any outside charity. I don't understand him, Lady Betty. But he's terribly in earnest. He frightened me."

"What is he like?"

"Tall, with long black hair and beard; and his eyes are awful, Lady Betty. I think he must be mad. And he was dressed so funnily, and his feet were bare. Yet there is something about him—I don't know what it is—but I felt for a moment as though I should like to help him. He seemed so much alone. It was like one man defying the whole world."

"Poor fellow!" said Lady Betty, "but he will do a

lot of harm if he takes young fellows away from their work. I've known several religious revivals, but they have all left less mark on the world than any quiet scheme of practical charity."

"It is not only the poor he wants to help, Lady Betty. It is every one—rich, well-to-do, beggars, every one. He says that money is now the god of the whole world."

"I am not sure that he is not right," said Lady Betty, with a sigh, "yet those who have it can do good to their less fortunate fellows. It is no use shouting and preaching about it. The best thing to do is to go on quietly, try and help the suffering and the poor, do what little one can in this world of sorrow and sin."

"He said that charity did no real good, and never would, so long as every one looked on money as the chief thing in life."

"I think he is wrong," said Lady Betty thoughtfully. "I am sure he is wrong. I must speak to Harry. You must see him to-night, and tell him to call here at half-past two to-morrow without fail. I think I shall be able to persuade him to give up this mad idea."

"It would break my heart," sobbed the girl, "if he were to leave me like this. We thought of being married next year. He was going to get a rise of salary in two months' time. And I have been saving now you've been so good to me. It seems so hard, Lady Betty——"

"Has he broken off the engagement?"

"No—o," stammered the girl. "I told you, Lady Betty, he wants me to come with him. We shall have no home—just the bare necessaries of life. We shall sleep anywhere, perhaps in a barn or by the roadside. We were to have gone and looked at furniture shops next week. It is cruel."

She buried her face in her hands and cried bitterly.

Lady Betty rose, and, coming to the girl's side, laid her hand upon the quivering shoulder.

"Don't be silly, Alice," she said tenderly. "It will be all right. I think I can promise you it will be all right. I will give him work here—at better wages. It will be different to working for Mr. Bland. He can have no scruples about this sort of business."

"Oh, thank you, Lady Betty, thank you so much. It is so good of you to help me."

"Not at all, child. You help me, and I want to help you. That's all. Come, wipe away those tears, and put on your hat and coat. You must look your best to-night, and perhaps you won't have to send Harry to me after all. A girl can do a lot by herself, if she looks pretty and charming."

Alice smiled, and dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"You are sweet to me, Lady Betty," she said. "I often think—but, of course, it's impertinent of me to think about it——"

She paused and blushed furiously.

"What is it you think, dear?"

"May I say it, Lady Betty? It is so often in my mind. I know a person in my position——"

"We are fellow-workers, Alice—in the same position."

"You are sweet to me, Lady Betty," she said slowly. "How lovely it would be for any man who married you, any clever, great man who wanted help in his work."

Lady Betty was silent, but her eyes filled with tears. Her love had been given to a man who was neither clever nor great, and the man was dead.

"You are angry with me, Lady Betty," faltered the girl after a long pause.

"Angry, dear? No, of course not. Why should I be angry? You have paid me a great compliment. But you mustn't talk of such things to an old maid."

The girl looked up into Lady Betty's face and she understood.

"I am so sorry—so sorry!"

For reply Lady Betty leant down and kissed her.

"Come, Alice," she said cheerfully, "you've got your own matrimonial affairs to think about. Put on your things and go and deal with this obstinate young fellow who loves you."

The girl rose to her feet and took up her hat. As she was thrusting the hatpin through it, she paused and listened. Afar off she heard the shrieks and yells of drunken men.

Lady Betty also heard the sound. It was not uncommon in that part of the world.

"You must stay here, Alice, for a few minutes. The streets are not safe for you. Look out of the window and see what they are shouting about."

The girl went to the window and opened it. Then she leant out and looked down the street. The noise came nearer and nearer.

"It's him!" she cried. "It's Father Francis. I can see his funny dress. Oh, they're ill-using him, Lady Betty."

The crowd surged down the street towards the Home of Rest.

"He is running," cried the girl. "He is afraid. Oh, where are the police?"

Lady Betty slipped out of the room and ran down the stairs to the hall. Then she opened the door. A tall man ran towards her and paused on the pavement opposite the house. In a few seconds a crowd had gathered round him.

"Stow yer jaw," cried one of them huskily. "What call 'ave yer to cry out against the likes of us. Give us food and less blather. Beasts of the field, 'e called us, mates. Give 'im a bit of claw."

An angry yell rose from the crowd, which was composed of haggard and drunken men and half-starved boys.

"Give our teeth a bit of crust," cried one voice, "or we'll 'ave a bite out of yer."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally.

"Friends," said Father Francis, and his strong voice rang out above the tumult, "I am poor even as you are. I, too, have starved, but I have learnt that poverty——"

"Give 'im one in the jaw, Bill. We've 'ad enough of 'im."

The crowd closed in on the tall figure. Lady Betty ran out from the doorway and laid her hand on the man's arm. He was between her and the light, and could not see her face.

"Come in here," she said quickly. "I want to speak to you—on a matter of business."

"Thank you," he said quietly. "I will come into your house, but do not think I am afraid."

"No, no. I want to speak to you. I am asking a favour."

He followed her into the house, and she closed the door.

The crowd outside yelled derision in the form of a comic song, lewd, ill-written, and unmusical.

When the door closed, Lady Betty stood in the full glare of the hall lamp, and Father Francis recognized her.

IX

THE SACRIFICE

HE showed no signs of the fear that he felt. But he scanned her features with his eyes. He was pleased to see that there was no trace of recognition in her face. A beard and moustache will disguise most men effectively from their intimate friends, but the change in Sir Richard Gaunt was even more complete than this. His long black hair, his lean, haggard face, and his garb in no way suggested the man who had said "Good-bye" before embarking on the *Santigan*. Moreover, he was supposed to be dead, and any resemblance would only be ascribed to a coincidence.

He noted the change that had taken place in the woman he had once pretended to love—the calm, sad face, the pallid skin, the lines about the mouth and eyes, the few gray hairs. She had changed from a rosy-cheeked girl to a middle-aged woman.

"I want to speak to you," she said quickly. "I have a favour to ask of you. I did not ask you in here to protect you, but because I have something to say to you. Will you come upstairs?"

He bared his head and followed her. As he walked up the wide staircase he wondered what she wished to say to him. Was it possible that she had heard of him, and shared his views? If so, would it be better to remain Father Francis, or to proclaim himself as Sir Richard Gaunt?

When they reached the room where Lady Betty transacted most of her business, Alice stood by the desk. She was dressed to go out.

"You must stay here, Alice, for a few minutes. It is not safe for you to go out just now. You'd better go to the telephone and ring up Messrs Bland. Ask Harry Brandon to come round and see me to-night."

The girl left the room, and Lady Betty pointed to a chair.

"Please sit down," she said. "I want to have a chat with you."

Father Francis seated himself in the chair, and was glad to find that the light from the standard electric lamp was not on his face. Lady Betty sat down at the desk and fingered some papers nervously.

"That girl who has just left the room," she began, "is engaged to be married. She is my secretary, and she is a good, sweet, honest girl. I am very fond of her. But her future does not lie in this work of mine. She looks forward to her marriage. She has saved up money for it. She has even chosen the place she wants to live in, and they have looked at wall-papers and furniture. They love each other dearly. The future happiness of both depends on marriage."

"Happiness does not depend on marriage," said Father Francis sternly.

"Her whole future happiness depends on this," reiterated Lady Betty Drake. "It is the natural and lawful ambition of every decent-minded girl. They have both been saving up for it. The young man has been in a good position, and earning good money. The girl has also been saving out of the wages I give her. The young man was, until yesterday, in the employment of the Bland International Stores. His name is Harry Brandon."

She paused as though waiting for a reply or some comment.

"I see," the man replied. "Harry Brandon? You think I am to blame for persuading him to leave a life of dishonesty and serve the cause of Christ."

"No, I do not blame you, Father Francis. I am sure you are acting from the highest motives. But I think you are mistaken. I have asked you in here to plead with you. Do not destroy the happiness of these two young lives."

Father Francis was silent, and sat with bowed head and folded arms. His face was stern and unrelenting.

"Surely it is better for him to work for his daily bread?" continued Lady Betty. "A man can live a good life, and be an example to others without——"

"No," he cried, rising to his feet. "I say, no. So long as he stayed in that shop he was a liar, a thief, ay, even, I dare say, a murderer. Boric acid in the milk, sulphuric acid in the vinegar, salts of lead in the sugar, poison in nearly everything, and where there was no poison, there was some cheap adulterant, which was disguised as the thing the customer asked and paid for. And all this for the mere making of money, for larger profits, in order that the proprietor might have his horses, his motor-car, his estate in the country. I tell you that of all the classes in England, who worship the god of money, there is none so despicable as your respectable, church-going, middle-class tradesman. He is sapping the vitality of the nation. He has been called the backbone of England. One of these days he will be the backbone of a skeleton."

He paused, with flashing eyes, trembling in every limb. In the enthusiasm of the moment he had forgotten the identity of the woman who was listening to him. He had thrown off all attempt at disguising his voice, and spoke in his natural tones. She looked hard at him, as though trying to recollect something in the past. The voice, save that it was more manly, stronger, and more resonant, was the voice of Sir Richard Gaunt. The features were almost entirely concealed with hair, but the eyes and nose in the uncertain light reminded her of the lover she had lost. She did not, however, allow her mind

to dwell on the subject for more than a few moments. She had two other people to occupy her thoughts.

"Those are hard words," she said, after a pause. "very hard words."

"But they are true. I saw a case in the paper—this very firm. The prosecution failed. The public are powerless. They have to eat, apparently, whatever is offered them. That is part of the price of civilization."

"They have the remedy in their own hands. They can go elsewhere."

"They find the same wherever they go. That is the terror of it all. 'Money' is the universal cry. 'Money at any cost!' So long as more money can be made by preserving rotten meat with boric acid, and selling potato spirit as whisky, so long will these practices continue. They are only symptoms of the same disease which makes the great financier rig a market in worthless shares or the thief steal silver spoons."

"Yet young Harry Brandon was only a servant. He could not help the frauds of his employer."

"He has taken a nobler view of the matter. He has protested against the 'custom of the trade.' He has refused to receive wages for service in so vile a cause."

"But there is other work for him to do," said Lady Betty fervently, "work of which no man could be ashamed. I am going to offer him a post here as a book-keeper, at better wages than he has been receiving from Mr. Bland."

Father Francis frowned. "I have heard of your work," he said quietly. "It is good and honourable. Unfortunately, however, it is only touching the surface of things. It does not go to the root of the matter, which is, after all, in the case of these poor women, the love of luxury, of pleasure, of money easily earned. These individual charities are worthy, and do credit to those who spend their time in the work, but they are quite ineffectual. What is wanted is some great crusade, some united effort

on the part of all good men and good women to overthrow the whole social system in which money is at present the only god men worship."

"I think you are wrong," answered Lady Betty nervously. "I believe in every one doing his best in his own way, hoping that it will be acceptable to God. But I did not ask you in here to argue with you on an abstract question, Father Francis. I believe you to be a good man, of strong principles, but with a kindly heart. Please do not take Harry Brandon from work which will enable him to marry this girl. You will only destroy innocent happiness. It will be so hard—for both of them. It will be cruel. I do not think that it will really serve your cause to do a thing like this."

"I have not forbidden his marriage," replied Father Francis gravely. "She can come with him, and help him in his work. She will be welcome."

"You know that it is no life for a woman," pleaded Lady Betty. "How can she stand it? It would kill her. There could be none of the happiness of marriage, the home-life, the children—do you understand all it would mean for her?"

"I understand. This will be the sacrifice demanded of her by God. No great work has yet been accomplished without sacrifice."

Lady Betty looked steadily into his face. She did not know how to reply to this stern enthusiast.

"Harry Brandon," he continued, "has been chosen for a great work. His heart is in it. He is, as yet, my only convert, the first-fruits of the victory which I am fighting for. Would you ask me to give him back to the world from which I have called him, to think of his earthly happiness, when I can offer him an immortal crown——"

"Oh, please do not talk like that," exclaimed Lady Betty piteously. "It makes me think that you are not sincere."

"I am sincere," he replied gravely. "I am terribly in earnest. This young man has put his hand to the plough, and he will not turn back. He will leave everything, give up everything, for the sake of the cause. He loves this girl very dearly, and he will lose a great happiness if he loses her. But the greater the loss, the nobler the sacrifice. God will reward him."

"He can do good work with me," said Lady Betty in a faltering voice; "good, honest work. I will pay him well."

"He will not do your work," he interrupted sharply; "he will be a mere clerk. His mind will be occupied with figures, not with charity. Your work is, of necessity, a woman's work, and you have every reason to be proud of it. But he will be no more than the pen with which you sign your name. There is something better for him to do in the world than that. He will lay his sacrifice on the altar of his faith."

"But the girl," said Lady Betty sadly, "it is of her I am thinking. What right has he to sacrifice her as well? She has placed her life's happiness in his hands."

"Perhaps she too will join us," replied Father Francis. "Perhaps God has work for her to do in the world. Who knows? If every woman were content with quiet domestic life, who would do such work as you are doing now? Are not you yourself an example of the good an unmarried woman may do in the world? It is only the unmarried, both men and women, who can devote all their thoughts and energies to a great work. You have sacrificed much—the home-life, the love of a husband and children, all that is most pure and sweet in earthly pleasures. But do you repent? Do you not know that you have found the truest happiness in all the world—the unselfish sacrifice for the good of others?"

"No, no," she replied faintly; "you must not speak

to me like that. It was not my choice. I do not claim any credit."

Her face grew very pale, and she leant back in her chair, as though exhausted by the agony of some great physical pain or sorrow. He noted the tired, haggard look on her face, the dull, listless eyes, the lines of suffering on the smooth, white flesh. And for a moment he forgot his life-work. He only remembered that this woman had loved him, and he longed to comfort her in her sorrow.

"It is God's will," he said tenderly, after a long silence. "Lady Betty, I have a message for you. I should have delivered it to you before, but my work has engrossed all my attention since I have been in England."

"A message?" she asked mechanically. "Oh, yes, of course. You have, I believe, a message for all the world, a gospel of simplicity and self-sacrifice."

"I have a personal message for you," he continued, "and it has no connection with my work." He paused. He was still standing, and the shaded lamp on the desk threw no light upon his face. He was glad of this, for he wished to comfort this woman by a simple falsehood.

"I have not been long in England," he began; "I came here from the deserts of Arabia. It was in the wilderness that the great message came to me. In my wanderings I met a man who had once lived a life of sin. He was in the wreck of the *Santigan*."

"The *Santigan*," said Lady Betty. "There were no survivors of the *Santigan*."

Then she lifted up the shade of the lamp so that the light fell upon his face. Her own was in darkness, and he could not see the sudden joy flash into her eyes.

He stood the ordeal without flinching. His arms were folded, and his head sunk upon his breast.

"This man," he continued in a calm voice, "was picked up by some fishermen, and for a year he lived with them.

In that time his mind and body underwent a change. He repented of his sins, and lived a clean, wholesome life. Then temptation again confronted him, and he fled from it into the great desert. It was there that I met him, and there that he gave me his message to you. His name was Sir Richard Gaunt."

"Yes?" the woman said in a faint voice. Her eyes were fixed on the desk in front of her, and she appeared to be thinking of something else.

"He gave me this message to you," the man continued firmly. "He asked me to tell you that before he left England he only pretended to love you, and was going to marry you for your money."

A faint sound came from the woman's lips, inarticulate, piteous.

"But, as he became a better man," Father Francis continued, "he realized your splendid worth, and by degrees came to love you with all his heart and soul."

Lady Betty did not speak, but she covered her eyes with one hand, as though to shade them from the light.

"He said that he would stay there in the wilderness till he was worthy of you, and that then he would return. He wished to be quite sure that he was strong enough to resist temptation."

"And when will he return?" asked Lady Betty slowly, without raising her head.

"He will not return," the man replied. "Sir Richard Gaunt is dead. But he died loving you, and with you in his last thoughts. 'It will be better for her,' he said to me. 'The world will gain what I have lost.' Those were his words before God called him."

For more than a minute there was silence. The woman still shaded her face with her hand. The man stood before her, as though awaiting sentence from a judge.

But he was the first to break the silence.

"The world will gain," he said gently. "It must al-

ways gain by self-sacrifice. You and the little girl, who is crying for her new-found lover—both of you are set apart for God's work. I, too, and this young man. We are giving up something. It is only in this way that one can do the highest form of work. There is no marriage for such as you and I."

"Then you will not let Harry Brandon come back to us?" she said, after a long pause.

"I will not," he answered firmly.

She bowed her head, as though in submission, and he turned to leave the room. Then, as though moved by a sudden impulse, he came back to her side.

"You are a good woman," he said simply. "May I ask you to pray for me?"

"I will pray for you," she replied, without looking at his face.

"And I will pray for you," he said in a low voice. "We are comrades—you and I. We are trying to do good in the world."

Father Francis left the room without another word. When he had closed the door behind him, Lady Betty Drake buried her face in her hands and sobbed piteously.

She had recognized Sir Richard Gaunt in this long-haired, wild-eyed preacher from the deserts of Arabia. Directly she set eyes on him his face and voice had dimly suggested her dead lover, but she had ascribed the resemblance to a mere coincidence. The message, however, and the mention of the *Santigan*, left no room for doubt, and when she threw the light of the lamp on the man's face, she knew that her lover had returned to her again.

In the great joy of the discovery she had nearly betrayed herself.

She heard the confession that he had only loved her for the sake of her money, and she cowered under the blow. Then, as she learnt that he had grown to love her, and would stay in the wilderness till he was worthy of

her, her heart beat fast with joy, and she waited eagerly for the words which she expected to come from his lips.

Then, impatient of the delay, she had asked him when Sir Richard Gaunt was going to return; and then the answer had come back to her.

"He will not return. Sir Richard Gaunt is dead."

And then Betty understood. Sir Richard Gaunt was dead. Father Francis was alive. He had ceased to be a man with human passions and feelings. He was going to devote all his time, and brains, and heart, and energy to the great work, to which he believed himself called.

He had asked her to pray for him. She was not to help him; she was to be neither his companion, his wife, nor his friend. She was only to pray for him, as one prays for the soul of the dead.

And now that he had gone, and she had time for thought, she recalled all that he had said in reference to Harry Brandon, and she realized that he was speaking, not only of the young man, but of himself.

"Sir Richard Gaunt is dead."

She folded her hands as if in prayer, and a great light came into her careworn face. He had given up his lands—his inheritance of Gaunt Royal; and he had given up all thought of the happiness which a wife and children bring to every good man. And he had done this, because he believed that it was the sacrifice demanded of him.

Could she do less than follow the example of the man she loved? She knew that she had devoted her life to good works, because the happiness of marriage had been denied to her, because she believed her lover to be dead. She realized that it was in no sense of the word a true sacrifice. The work had filled a blank in her life. She had given up nothing. But everything else had been taken from her.

Now that she knew the truth, however, her work would

stand on a different plane. This man had thrust her out of his life, but he was still a man of human passions and weaknesses. If he loved her, and his words left no doubt on this point, it would not perhaps be so very hard to make him falter in his purpose. He would see that, after all, a man engaged in a great work would be helped and not hindered by a sympathetic wife.

But there was the difficulty, the crux of the whole matter. Was she in sympathy with his work? Was it not too wild, too ideal, too impracticable for the approval of a sane and healthy-minded woman? Was there even the remotest chance of success? Was it not utterly useless, a waste of time and talent that might profitably be employed on a less gigantic scheme? Her own labours were eminently practical. They were devoted to a single portion of the sin and misery of the world. But this man would not deign to turn his attention to anything less than a war with the whole social system. She had no sympathy with the scheme. As a sensible, level-headed woman, she knew that it was better to do a small thing thoroughly than to attempt a work beyond the powers of any man's strength and intellect.

No, it was quite certain that marriage would hinder both of them in their work, and it would, indeed, be hardly possible for Father Francis to marry. The nature of his task prevented him from taking to himself a wife. There would be no home, no children, nothing but poverty and shame and ridicule for the woman who married such a man as this. He had expressed himself plainly on the matter.

Only one thing could make their marriage possible. They would both have to give up their work, and narrow down their lives to an existence of domestic happiness and such charity as can be done by the ordinary good people of the world.

For a few minutes she flattered herself with the visions

of what she had lost, and what she yet might win again. And then, like some clear, pitiless searchlight thrown upon the vague and dreary beauties of a landscape at eventide, there broke upon her mind the truth.

“Before God called him.”

Father Francis had been speaking of the supposed death of Sir Richard Gaunt. But she did not doubt that he had chosen the words carefully. They would bear another and a truer interpretation.

So God had called him. His life had been spared. His mind and heart had been moulded to purer and nobler things. He had returned to England, a man of whom any woman might be proud. And to what end had all this been done? That he might marry her? That he might be worthy of her love? No, that he might devote his life to a great work, and sacrifice everything to the accomplishment of his purpose.

She bowed her head in her hands and prayed that God would be merciful to both of them.

Then the door opened and Alice entered. Her face was white and tear-stained. She was a picture of helpless misery.

“Well, Alice,” said Lady Betty kindly, “when is he coming?”

A hard look came into the girl’s face—a look that no one had ever seen there before.

“He is not coming,” she said coldly. “He has said he will not come.”

“Did he say anything else?”

“Yes,” answered the girl, clenching her hands. “He has said good-bye. He thinks it is better we should not meet any more.”

Lady Betty was silent. She was looking at the expression on the girl’s face, and wondering what evil thoughts were in the mind of this innocent child.

“Is this religion,” the girl continued. “If so, I——”

"Hush, Alice, hush! This is wicked; you are too young to understand——"

"I read a book not long ago," Alice went on with the bitterness of reckless despair. "Poems by a Mr. Swinburne."

"Where did you get it?" asked Lady Betty sharply. She did not approve of Swinburne for young girls.

"From the public library. I did not like it. But I remember two lines, and I think he must have been speaking the truth."

She paused, white-faced and wild-eyed, like a woman who is going to cast herself over a precipice."

"Well?" asked Lady Betty gently.

"I remember them well. I was shocked at the time.

"Thou has conquered, O pale Gallæan,
And the world has grown grey with thy breath."

Ah! I believe it. It is true!"

Her voice rose to a scream. She passed her hands to her head, as though in pain. Lady Betty came quickly to her side, and placed one arm round her neck.

"Alice," she said gently, "dearest Alice."

"He has been taken from me," the girl continued in the same hard voice; "it is cruel. It is not right that he should be taken. That man is a devil."

A look of horror came into Lady Betty's face. This gentle girl seemed to have cast herself off from all the firm ground of her religious training into a sea of blasphemy. If only the girl would burst into tears, go into hysterics, faint—anything would be better than this hard and bitter voice of despair.

Lady Betty took her arm from the girl's neck and walked over to the desk.

"Alice," she said sharply, "you had better go home. I cannot listen to you. I don't think you know what you

are saying. I shall not try and help you while you talk like this."

"Yes, I had better go home," she said mechanically.

"'Thou hast conquered, O pale Galliaean.'

No, no, I do not mean that, I do not—oh, Lady Betty, Lady Betty, what have I said, what have I done? Oh, forgive me, save me!"

Her hard, even voice rose into a cry of fear and entreaty, and then she burst into a storm of tears. Her frail little body was convulsed with a paroxysm of weeping. She pressed her hands to her face, and the tears ran down her cheeks. The madness was over.

Lady Betty came to her side, and took the girl in her arms.

"It is all for the best, dear," she said gently. "You may be sure it is all for the best. You must be brave. All will come right one of these days; and if not, Alice, we both have work to do, and we'll do it well."

The girl flung her arms round Lady Betty's neck, and the two women cried together, each of them for the lover she had lost.

X

THE GREAT PAPER TRUST

"WELL, Dixon, what's the news this morning?" Mr. Lampirthy leant back in his chair, with a cigar between his lips, and an open newspaper on his knees. The keen-faced secretary had just entered the room with a newspaper and some letters in his hand.

"Purl and Stanton have failed, sir. But I suppose you saw it in the paper."

"No, I hadn't noticed it; but I knew it was only a matter of a week or two."

"They attribute the failure to the low price of paper," continued Dixon, "Due to the cutting competition of several large combines. They will pay two shillings in the pound."

"Several large combines," repeated Mr. Lampirthy drily. "That is good, very good," and he smiled, as though the situation was full of humour.

"That is the last of 'em, sir, the last of any importance."

"Excellent, excellent."

"There's a paragraph here I thought might interest you, sir," said Dixon, holding out a newspaper. Mr. Lampirthy took it from his hand and read a few lines marked in blue pencil.

"During the past month no fewer than a hundred new magazines and newspapers have been started in the United Kingdom alone. This is undoubtedly due to the extraordinary cheapness of paper at the present time. We cannot help thinking that the proprietors of these new journals would have done well to examine the causes of present

conditions in the paper trade. It is hardly likely that the twenty great combines, which practically control the market, will continue to go on cutting each other's throats for an indefinite period. The time is ripe for the amalgamation of the various opposing interests, and then there will be trouble."

"That is very true," said Mr. Lampirthy, as he folded up the paper and handed it back to the secretary.

A servant entered and handed Mr. Lampirthy a piece of grimy paper folded once down the middle. The millionaire glanced at it and nodded.

"Show him up here," he said, with a frown.

Father Francis entered the room, and remained standing, while Mr. Lampirthy regarded him with a look of disapproval.

"I asked you not to call here," said the millionaire, after a pause.

"The time for secrecy has gone by," said the preacher sternly, "the hour has come for an open confession. We must stand side by side before the world. I am no longer a friend to be ashamed of. I am, in all humility, the leader of a great cause."

"You must allow me to judge whether the time for secrecy has gone by," replied Mr. Lampirthy coldly. "But since you are here, I should like to have a chat with you. Pray sit down. You look tired."

"I am tired," Father Francis said gently.

He seated himself wearily in an arm-chair, and for a moment his attitude suggested a collapse of all physical powers. His head fell forward on his breast. His arms hung limply down by his side.

Three months had passed since Father Francis had first met Mr. Lampirthy, and during that time the man's body had undergone a great change. It had shrunk almost to a skeleton. The hands were nothing but skin and bone. The face was yellow and haggard; and the eyes, sunk

deep in their sockets, glittered with unnatural brilliance. He was not strong enough for the work he had set himself to do. His healthy existence in the desert had given his wasted body a fresh lease of life. But he had reached an age when the excesses of youth begin to tell on a man's frame.

"You mustn't overdo it," said Mr. Lampirthy, after a pause. "You must put more restraint on yourself. I was sorry to learn that your last great appeal, when nearly ten thousand people listened to you, was singularly lacking in restraint. You seem to be setting aside the practical part of the question, and indulging in violent rhetoric. That can do no cause any good."

"Were you there?" asked Father Francis, raising his head and looking at the millionaire with his burning eyes.

"No, I was not there. But I sent a shorthand writer, and he reported everything you said. I have read the verbatim report."

"He did not tell you, I suppose, that I made two hundred converts at that meeting?"

"No, he didn't wait for that."

"I thought not. My audience, you see, did not take the same view of my rhetoric as you do, Mr. Lampirthy.

"You must be more practical," reiterated the millionaire. "You must show them the practical good you wish to do in the world. That was your idea at first. But you are losing sight of it now. You thunder out denunciations; you paint ghastly pictures; you frighten them into conversion. All that is no good. You must appeal to the intellect, not the heart. You said yourself that emotional religion never lasted."

"I do things in my own way," replied Father Francis sternly, "in the way in which I can do them best. I leave the business, the practical side of the campaign, in your hands. That is why I came to you in the first place."

Mr. Lampirthy did not reply, but, opening the folio-

book which the secretary had brought to him, he ran his fingers down a column of dates, and paused at one only three weeks distant.

"Let us come to business," he said, after a pause. "The Paper Combine is now an accomplished fact. Paper has never been so cheap as it is to-day."

"So cheap," repeated Father Francis mechanically, as if he did not understand what Mr. Lampirthy was talking about. "Yes, but your scheme—for the great cause? If paper is cheap——"

Mr. Lampirthy smiled. He did not trouble to explain.

"That is what I want to talk to you about, Father Francis. The time is ripe for a great movement. But we must go slowly to work. We have, in fact, a very difficult and delicate job before us. We cannot stand over these fellows with a revolver and force our views upon them."

"Why not?" asked Father Francis fiercely. "You are the master. You explained it all to me. They must do what you wish. You have been given a sword. Strike with it and slay this cursed serpent that is crushing out all the life-blood of the nation in its coils."

"I am glad that you are not managing the business," said Mr. Lampirthy laconically, "or we should be the laughing-stock of England. Well, what is your programme? I suppose you have definite views which you want to force upon the Press—something reasonable, something which will not make the papers ridiculous. You must remember that. A newspaper is not the place for a sermon. We shall defeat our own ends by doing anything of that sort, anything that will excite ridicule. What do you wish me to request the editors and proprietors to do?"

"In the first place," said Father Francis, "there must be no betting news, and no Stock Exchange quotations."

"H'm—yes. Well, what then?"

"All news must be true; there must be no scare headlines; no fabrication of news."

"Yes?"

"Then such matters as police-court news, divorce cases, murders, and all things of that sort must be treated differently. At present they are not given as mere items of news, but are recognized as pleasing subjects for perusal. The details are dwelt upon and enlarged. The more terrible the murder, the more space is given to the subject. These are items of news that ought to be merely touched upon in brief paragraphs. There should be no flaring headlines. It speaks very little for men and women that they should be induced to buy a paper by the words, 'Ghastly Tragedy in Clerkenwell!' or 'Shocking Disclosures in a West-End Scandal!'"

"You speak sensibly," said Mr. Lampirthy grimly.

"On the other hand," continued Father Francis, "all acts of heroism, all stories of self-sacrifice, of suffering nobly borne, of devotion to a father, or a mother, or a wife, or a child, or religion, or one's country, or anything that claims respect, should be dwelt on and made the most of. At present the man who gives his life for another is accorded a small paragraph in an obscure corner, while the name of the murderer is blazoned forth on every placard. It is not flattering to the public to suppose that they would rather read about a murderer than a hero."

"Every word you say is true."

"Then less space must be given to the doings of the rich, to the advertising of those who are merely wealthy. There must be no more 'Interviews with the Richest Man in the World.'"

Mr. Lampirthy laughed, but there was no answering smile on the speaker's face.

"Then there comes the question of politics," said Father Francis. "I do not wish to favour one party more than another. But it must be made clear that party views are subordinate to the good of the general public. Statesmen must be taught that a measure is not necessarily bad be-

cause it is introduced by his political opponents. The man of high ideals, the man who resolves to do the best, not for himself, but for the whole nation, must be supported. No measure must be looked upon as a means of catching votes. It must be regarded on its own merits."

"I'm afraid we shall have some difficulty in the political department."

"It must be overcome," said Father Francis. "Then there is the question of war. I am an advocate for peace, but war is inevitable when the strong desire to spoil the weak. But this war of newspapers must cease. It must be the first duty of a paper to speak kindly of other nations. There must be no more 'pin pricks,' no more of that perpetual irritation, caused by the comments of the Press. At one time we badger France, at another Germany, at another Russia. And they return the compliment. All that must cease. It makes a great deal of mischief."

"I believe you," said Mr. Lampirthy. "And what else do you propose?"

"Those are the main principles which you can and must inculcate."

"You have not mentioned religion."

"No," said Father Francis slowly, "I have not mentioned religion. You seemed to think that anything of the nature of a sermon would excite ridicule. I am inclined to believe that you are right. The newspaper must teach by example, and not by precept. It is their place to record news and influence public opinion. They will do it best by following out the lines I have indicated."

"Do you mind repeating the various items?" said Mr. Lampirthy. "I will take a note of them, and consider how far they can be reasonably impressed on the minds of the various editors and proprietors."

Father Francis repeated his words in a calm, business-

like tone. When he had finished, Mr. Lampirthy placed the notes in his pocket and lit another cigar.

"That is the way to talk," he said, after a pause. "I am sure if you would only speak calmly and sensibly, you would do more good than you effect with all your fervent oratory. You can drop all that rhetoric and wild enthusiasm when you choose."

Father Francis rose to his feet, and his thin body seemed to tremble. He stretched out his hands.

"It is not thus I would speak to the world," he cried. "God does not save sinners by argument. He speaks to their hearts, not to their intellects."

"I dare say you're right," said Mr. Lampirthy coldly. "You seem to be clever enough. Well, I don't think I need detain you any longer. In three weeks' time I shall begin to move in this matter. On that date our contract with the *Daily Biograph* expires. I shall interview Mallard myself. You have nothing more to say to me, I suppose."

"Yes," cried Father Francis, "I have something more to say to you—something which must be said."

"Say on," said Mr. Lampirthy, with a slight frown; "but remember that I have no heart, only a clear brain."

"Mr. Lampirthy, the time has come when you will have to identify yourself with our principles, when you will have to be one of us, to live our life, to show by your own example that a rich man finds his truest happiness in a life of simplicity. You will no longer be able to stand at a distance. Men will know that you are supplying the sinews of war. They will ask your motives. They will point to you as the exact antithesis of all my teaching. They will doubt the sincerity of a cause whose existence depends on a man that does not follow its main principles. We shall incur ridicule and contempt."

"What would you have me do?" asked Mr. Lampirthy,

with a quiet smile. "Go forth into the streets and preach?"

"No. I do not ask that of you. But I would ask you to step down from your wealth and luxury to the same level on which I and my followers stand, to show the world that a rich man cares nothing for his riches, and is content with the lot of those, who have only the necessities of life."

"People would say I had gone off my head. And that would do no good to your cause. I've told you," he said, after a pause, "I have no heart; it is useless to appeal to it. Besides, there are practical difficulties. I'm afraid Mrs. Lampirthy and Sibyl would raise objections."

Father Francis bowed his head, and his lips moved, as if in prayer. For a moment he stood motionless; then he left the room without another word.

When he had gone, Mr. Lampirthy sat for some minutes in his chair, and his thoughts seemed to trouble him.

Then he smiled, and, opening the book containing the names of the newspapers, he took out a pencil and began to mark all those whose contracts would expire during the next six months.

When he had finished, he rang the bell.

"Tell Mrs. Lampirthy I should like to see her," he said to the servant.

In a few minutes Mrs. Lampirthy entered the room. Her small face was puckered up in a frown of displeasure.

"I wish you would not send for me, Harry," she said petulantly; "one would think I was your secretary or a servant."

"I apologize," he said, with a grim smile. "But I'm busy, and can't spare the time to run about looking for you."

"Well, what is it?"

"I'm going to give up these rooms here," he said. "You and Sibyl had better go down to Watersmeet."

"Leave Town now? Ridiculous! You must be mad!"

"Perhaps I am. Anyhow, I'm giving notice to the hotel to-day."

"Do you mean this?" asked Mrs. Lampirthy tearfully.

"It is wicked; it is cruel."

"I generally mean what I say," he replied, commencing to write a letter.

"And you?"

"I'll come down now and then. I shall be very busy for the next month or two. I shall be taking an office, and shall probably sleep in it."

"Can't we go and stay with the Anstruthers? You know how Lady Ansthuther dotes on Sibyl. She asked us to go there last——"

"No," said Mr. Lampirthy sternly. "I want you to go to Watersmeet—the country. I insist on Sibyl living in the country."

Mrs. Lampirthy went out of the room and banged the door. Mr. Lampirthy finished his letter, and then read it through carefully. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,—I want to have a talk with you to-morrow on a matter of importance. Will call at your offices at 11:30.—Yours faithfully, HARRY K. LAMPIETHY."

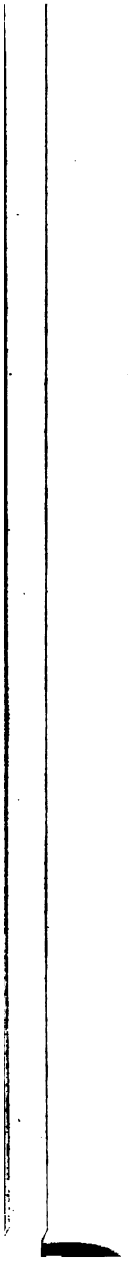
He gave no explanation of his business. His name would carry enough weight to obtain the interview.

He addressed the envelope to:—

"Joseph Mallard, Esq., *Daily Biograph*, Capper Street, E.C."



"No," he replied gravely, "it was not yours. It was the sin of the man. Page 264



XI

LITERATURE AND FINANCE

MR. MALLARD, sole proprietor of that very successful morning paper, the *Daily Biograph*, had every reason to be pleased with himself.

It was the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the paper, and the desk in front of him was heaped high with congratulatory letters and telegrams. Some of these were unsolicited testimonials; others had been sent in reply to a short note stating that the paper would celebrate its jubilee on such-and-such a date, and asking for a brief expression of opinion on the way in which the paper was conducted, etc., etc. But all were satisfactory. Not a single discordant note spoilt the swelling chorus of praise. There was an excellent reason for this unanimity of opinion. Those who did not approve of the paper or Mr. Mallard, had made no reply at all.

Not the least satisfactory of all the letters which had come by that morning's post was the brief communication from the "Richest Man in the World." It is true that it did not contain a word of congratulation; but Mr. Mallard read between the lines. Mr. Lampirthy would tender his compliments in person; he had also a business proposition to make. Such propositions, made to a leading newspaper by a millionaire, were usually of a satisfactory nature. They involved the payment of a large sum of money for a small and easily-performed service.

Mr. Mallard lit a large cigar, and, leaning back in his chair, regarded the great pile of letters and telegrams with a complacent smile. He was a small man of about fifty, clean-shaven, with dark hair, and a bold Hebraic nose.

But Mr. Mallard's self-satisfied expression on this par-

ticular morning was not entirely due to the letters of congratulation, though he looked forward with pleasure to the extracts that would appear in his paper for many days to come. He was thinking of the huge increase in profits which would come to him in three weeks' time. He was at present paying twenty per cent. more than the market price for his paper. In three weeks' time his contract with the South Eastern Paper Mills, Limited, would come to an end. The new contract would be drawn up on a very different basis.

He was not deceived by the extraordinary fall in the price of paper. He recognized that it was due to the fierce competition between several large combines. He foresaw the possibility of an amalgamation and the raising of prices all round. But he would get his contract settled before this took place. He would bargain for five per cent. over the present price, and, even if he had to pay seven and a half per cent., he would save half a crown in every sovereign.

At eleven-thirty Mr. Lampirthy arrived. The millionaire bowed slightly, and then, as Mr. Mallard came forward to greet him, he shook hands with excessive cordiality.

"Heartiest congratulations, Mr. Mallard," he said genially. "Fifty years, eh? Well, you have every reason to be pleased with yourself."

"I have, I have," replied Mr. Mallard, with the suspicion of a tear in his eye. "There was nearly a death fifteen years ago. Please sit down. May I offer you a cigar?"

Mr. Lampirthy took the cigar, lit it carefully, and leant back in an arm-chair. It was by the merest chance that the interview had opened so amicably. On his way down to the office he had purchased a copy of the *Daily Biograph*, and therein he had seen the account of the jubilee, under the heading of "Fifty Years of Honest Endeavour."

Mr. Mallard seated himself at his desk, behind his pile of congratulations. He picked up a telegram and perused it with a smile, waiting for Mr. Lampirthy to speak.

"I have come here to-day," said Mr. Lampirthy after a few moments of silence, "both to offer you my best wishes for the future, and to talk over a little matter of business—just between ourselves. It concerns others, but these things are always settled more quickly and pleasantly when only two do the talking."

"Just so, Mr. Lampirthy, just so."

"You buy your paper from the South Eastern Paper Mills Company, Limited, I believe, and your contract expires in three weeks' time. May I ask if you think of renewing it?"

Mr. Mallard thrust aside all thoughts of the great jubilee, and his face became keen and alert. He no longer smiled.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Lampirthy," he said, "but I should like to know what interest you have in this contract."

"I am the South Eastern Paper Mills Company."

"Not a director, I think?"

"No, but I hold most of the shares."

"I see. I didn't know that. Well, you have done well out of us lately. We've been paying you twenty per cent. over the market price of paper."

"Do you wish to renew the contract?"

"We are satisfied with the stuff you send us," said Mr. Mallard, screwing up his eyelids so that only two mere dots of eyes showed through the crinkled flesh. "But, of course, the terms will have to be different."

"Of course," said Mr. Lampirthy drily, "of course, Mr. Mallard, the terms will have to be different."

"Very different," said Mr. Mallard with emphasis.

"Very different," Mr. Lampirthy echoed. "Do you

know, Mr. Mallard, I've often thought that the position of a newspaper proprietor is one to be envied. You have so much power in your hands for good or evil. It must be very pleasant to have so much power."

"It is pleasant," said Mr. Mallard, but without enthusiasm. He was asking himself what his visitor wanted. Mr. Lampirthy had not the reputation of being a man to waste much time in useless intercourse.

"I once thought of starting a paper myself," continued Mr. Lampirthy, "and I even sketched out the lines on which I should run such a paper. I have them here. Perhaps you would like to glance over them." And, without waiting for a reply, he rose to his feet, drew out several sheets of paper from his pocket, and thrust them into the hands of the astonished Mr. Mallard.

"My dear sir," said the proprietor, "we all have ideas. But the practical man——"

"Please read them," said Mr. Lampirthy quickly. "I should value your opinion on them."

"My dear Mr. Lampirthy, I really—I am so busy this morning. I will look at them to-night. I'm sure it will be most interesting—ah—!" he paused as though a sudden thought had struck him—"if you would only consent."

"Consent to what?" asked Mr. Lampirthy sharply.

"To our publishing these views of yours. 'The way to run a newspaper, by the richest man in the world.' There's a headline for you. If you would only consent. It would be worth money to us."

Mr. Lampirthy did not reply. But he smiled at the suggestion. Under the circumstances it was distinctly humorous.

"But we are digressing," continued Mr. Mallard. "You were talking of the new contract."

"Please read that paper," insisted Mr. Lampirthy. "I want your opinion. This may mean business for you."

"Business?" queried Mr. Mallard. "Oh, well, of course——"

He commenced to read the paper, which contained the views expressed by Father Francis on the previous day. Mr. Lampirthy watched his face, and observed the occasional smile and the slight shrug of the shoulders.

"It does you credit, Mr. Lampirthy," he said, handing the paper back to the millionaire. "They are the views of a thoughtful man, and all the more creditable because they come from the brain of a millionaire. They show, if I may say so, a soul above money. Yes, certainly you must let me publish them in our paper."

"I dare say it can be arranged," said Mr. Lampirthy drily, "but how does the idea strike you? Would you care to run the *Daily Biograph* on these lines?"

Mr. Mallard laughed heartily.

"I have had ideals myself," he replied genially, "but one is forced to set them aside in the stress of business. I dare say you have felt the same way yourself. It would be a fine thing to run the *Biograph* on the lines you suggested for your own paper, but—well, I run my paper to make money."

"And you think a paper run on these lines would lose money?"

"It might not lose money, but it would make very little."

"Yet all the ideas I have suggested might be worked up—by a clever man like yourself, with a clever staff. Sensational little paragraphs, you know, about people who have done good in the world. Bright, snappy little articles running down the worship of money, showing the evils of wealth, the happiness of the simple life. Why, such a paper would cause something of a sensation."

"For a day, yes. But I would certainly—and I speak as a practical business man—I would certainly not advise any one to sink money in it."

"H'm," said Mr. Lampirthy thoughtfully. "Well, now, about this contract?"

Mr. Mallard looked sharply at the speaker. He wondered why the conversation was being switched so rapidly from one subject to another.

"I would suggest an advance of five per cent. on the present prices," he said quickly. "I recognize, of course, that paper is remarkably cheap just now."

"It is, as you say, remarkably cheap. The price will, as a matter of fact, rise considerably. In a few months' time paper will cost nearly twice as much as it does to-day."

"Twice as much?" queried Mr. Mallard, with the smile of superior knowledge. "My dear sir, I'm afraid you have not mastered all the details of the business. There is a price beyond which paper cannot rise. If such an advance as you speak of were to take place, every newspaper in England would cease to exist."

"H'm, yes! Perhaps so. But they might charge more—say, twopence a copy."

"Ridiculous," said Mr. Mallard, "ridiculous. It would be impossible. The public would never stand it."

"Yet such an advance is quite possible," continued Mr. Lampirthy. "Has it never struck you that a combination of the various interests is possible. If such a thing took place, they might put paper to any price they like."

"Not if they wished to sell it," replied Mr. Mallard. "They wouldn't cut their own throats by asking a price which no newspaper could possibly pay."

"Well, we shall see. But, as to the contract, we are willing to renew it, at a price somewhat in advance of the old terms—say, fifty per cent."

Mr. Millard looked at the speaker in blank astonishment. Then he laughed—a trifle nervously, for he thought he was in the presence of a lunatic.

"My dear Mr. Lampirthy!" he cried, "whatever do you mean? Surely you are joking."

"I am in earnest. Fifty per cent. on the old price—those are our terms."

"I'm afraid, then, we shall not be able to do business. Hughes and Allen have wanted to supply us for some years. Surely it was waste of time to come to me with such a wild proposition as this."

"Not at all," replied Mr. Lampirthy quietly. "I'm afraid you won't get much better terms from Hughes and Allen."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Mallard.

"I have a controlling interest in their business as well."

"Well, there are plenty of other manufacturers."

"Oh, yes, plenty, but I'm afraid you will find their terms all about the same."

Mr. Mallard's jaw dropped, and his face grew pale. The interview, which hitherto had seemed like a ludicrous waste of time, had suddenly assumed a more serious aspect. Then he suddenly rose to his feet, and leant across the desk. A pile of congratulatory letters went flying to the floor.

"What on earth do you mean?" he exclaimed savagely. "What are you driving at?"

"I mean," Mr. Lampirthy replied calmly, "that the Paper Combine is already an accomplished fact. The paper trade of the world is practically in my hands."

"Great heavens!" gasped Mr. Mallard! and then he sank back in his chair, and mopped his white face with his handkerchief. Mr. Lampirthy smiled.

"I can, of course, ask what price I like," he said, after a pause.

Mr. Mallard regained his composure, and his keen business mind reasserted itself.

"You want profits," he said calmly, "want to sell your paper, I suppose. No one will buy on those terms."

"I have, as you know, plenty of money," Mr. Lampirthy replied. "If I lost every penny I have put into the business, I should still have enough for all my wants. But I have a proposal to make to you, Mr. Mallard. Do you remember the details which I gave you just now—my scheme for the ideal paper?"

"Yes," said Mr. Mallard angrily. "And of all the rubbish——"

"Wait a moment," interrupted Mr. Lampirthy. "I think if you study the details well, you will see that a paper conducted on those lines might be a good and successful paper. I hope, for your own sake, that you will be able to look at the scheme in that light, for, if you agree to run the *Daily Biograph* on those lines, I will let you have your paper at a price which will cost you five per cent. less than you are paying now."

"Impossible!" said Mr. Mallard. "Ridiculous. No newspaper could be run on those lines. I absolutely refuse."

"Then I'm afraid you will have to pay fifty per cent. more than you are paying at present."

"This is robbery!" shouted Mr. Mallard, "black-mail! I refuse to be coerced! The Press is free in this country!"

"Yes, but unfortunately the paper it is printed on is not. No newspaper can be run at all if paper advances fifty per cent. I believe you said so yourself."

"I'll start my own mills."

"Indeed?" Mr. Lampirthy queried sarcastically. "And stop the issue of your newspaper till the mills are erected?"

"No; buy your paper at a loss."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Lampirthy quietly. "I have provided for that. If you set up mills, you shan't have any of my paper at all—at any price. Besides, I have purchased the patents of all the best machinery in the trade."

I can assure you that I have overlooked nothing. I am used to big jobs of this sort."

"Why have you picked us out for this mad scheme?" cried Mr. Mallard. His cheeks were flushed, and the veins stood out on his forehead.

"You are not the only one. I am going to purify the Press of this country. You can take it as a compliment that I have come to you first. If you're wise, you'll make the most of that."

"I'll expose the whole business—to-morrow. I'll show you, Mr. Lampirthy, what the power of the Press is like." He stretched out his hand to a bell, and then paused. Mr. Lampirthy had risen to his feet.

"You won't be such a fool," said the millionaire quietly. "You know that, if you carried out your threat, the *Daily Biograph* would cease to exist in three weeks' time. I should have no mercy."

"I believe you are mad," exclaimed Mr. Mallard. "What's your game? Is this all a pose, or do you really——?"

"I am in earnest. I wish to do good in the world."

"One would think you had been listening to that fellow who calls himself Father Francis," said Mr. Mallard, with a sneer.

"Perhaps I have. But that is none of your business. I'll give you forty-eight hours to consider my offer—not a minute longer. It will give you time to make inquiries and satisfy yourself that you can't get paper except on my terms."

"I shall wire to every firm this afternoon."

"Excellent! You will also have time to study my scheme, and see if you can't make something good out of it. Here are the details." He drew the paper from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Mallard, who took it without a word.

"Good-day," said Mr. Lampirthy, with his fingers on

the handle of the door, "and please remember that, if a word of this interview becomes public property, you will have to turn your attention to some other business."

He opened the door and closed it behind him. Mr. Mallard rang the bell for his shorthand clerk, and dictated telegrams. From editor to printer's devil, every living soul in the office of the *Daily Biograph* was destined to feel the lash of Mr. Mallard's tongue for many hours to come.

XII

THE CAMPAIGN

DURING the next three months events moved rapidly, and at the end of that period Father Francis was one of the most notable men in England.

The capitulation of Mr. Mallard was the first victory in a war that was destined to shake the whole newspaper world to its foundation. The proprietor of the *Daily Biograph* was a shrewd man, and he resolved to make the best of a bad job. He even managed to turn his misfortunes to profit. He was the first in the field, and knew the value of self-advertisement. He contributed a long article to the number which introduced the change in the policy of the paper. It was a very striking article, and its language left nothing to be desired, being the work of Mr. Pritchard, the editor, who was a man of high literary talents.

In a column and a half of superb English, Mr. Mallard explained that the time had come when it was necessary to reform the whole character of journalism. The Press, he explained, was the greatest power in the world. It ought to be used for the good of the community. In future the *Daily Biograph* would strive to attain a high ideal, to lead men's thoughts to a higher plane. He was proud to be the pioneer of a movement which was destined to revolutionize the whole Press. At any cost he was resolved to do his duty to himself and his fellow-men, and so on, and so on, till he reached the great appeal to the British public, which formed the peroration of his article.

The first number of the revised *Daily Biograph* raised a chorus of criticism and ridicule. For a few days the demand for the paper rose above the capacity of the print-

ing presses. Then there came a deluge of indignant letters from "old subscribers." The circulation began to sway slowly downwards. But Mr. Mallard worked like a hero, and he stopped the fall. The paper simply revelled in every conceivable form of virtue, presented in the most attractive paragraphs. Mr. Lampirthy drove round to the offices of the paper and knocked off another two and a half per cent. from the price of paper. Mr. Mallard began to see that virtue was not such an unprofitable thing after all.

Then came the surrender of the *Morning Telephone*, and people began to wonder what kind of madness had suddenly bitten the minds of London editors. This great journal was in the awkward position of not being the first in the field, but it made the best of matters. It explained that for many years it had held these high ideals, but that it had only waited for an opportunity. The time was now ripe, and, therefore—and so on, and so on, in columns of turgid prose.

After that the great papers of London and the provinces succumbed with startling rapidity. Mr. Lampirthy moved among them like a hurricane. Some of them demurred, others gave in without a struggle. When they realized the truth, they were eager enough to make the change. The longer they delayed, the less merit they could claim for their "heartfelt" conversion to the cause of truth.

The reading public were completely staggered by the extraordinary conduct of their favourite journals. Those who wanted betting news and Stock Exchange quotations, and sensation, and crime, and the spicy details of divorce, transferred their allegiance elsewhere. But the ground was continually being knocked from under their feet. Some of the smaller newspapers blossomed out like full-blown pink roses. Then came the day when they either disappeared or followed the lead of their greater rivals.

The only papers which survived the avalanche of Mr.

Lampirthy's wealth, were those which had their own mills. They made money, but they were the mark for a thousand shafts. They stood out like islands of mud in a sea of pure water. And they were not entirely free from the grip of Mr. Lampirthy's fingers. When their machinery wore out, they would be helpless. He hung a two-edged sword over their heads, and the thread that supported it was very thin.

And all this time Mr. Lampirthy was in his element. Never, in the whole long course of his financial career, had he found himself in the thick of so gigantic a conflict. Battle was meat and drink to the man, and here was as hot and exciting a contest as the fiercest soldier could desire. It consisted in engagement after engagement, in victory after victory. And yet nothing was easy. Every single paper had to be tackled in a different way. And there was always the possibility of defiance.

Then there would come the final crash of arms, the day when he would stand out before all the world as the organizer of the great campaign. So far nothing definite had leaked out. But the secret could not be kept for long. Nor, indeed, so far as Mr. Lampirthy was concerned, was there any reason why it should be kept at all. But the editors and proprietors of the various papers concerned had every inducement to keep the Great Paper Combine out of the matter. They did not wish the public to know that they had been forced to take up their present attitude, and that they were practically at the mercy of one hard and unscrupulous man. They preferred to pose as reformers, actuated by the highest and most unselfish motives. Yet they knew that exposure must come, and they invited Mr. Lampirthy to a conference at the offices of the *Daily Biograph*.

After a discussion which lasted for over five hours, and the proposal and rejection of a dozen different schemes, they came to the conclusion that there was no way out of

the difficulty, and that they would have to face it with unblushing effrontery.

They agreed to acknowledge Mr. Lampirthy as the organizer of the whole movement, and he, on the other hand, agreed to pose, not as the financier who had coerced them to his will with threats, but as the earnest and persuasive pleader who had converted them by the sheer strength of his reasoning and rhetoric. The story was a trifle thin, but Mr. Lampirthy, who was on the best of terms with all of them, and who had already made some compensation for their losses by still further reducing the price of paper, made a proposal which was met with general approval.

"We must all pull together in this," he said earnestly. "Your interests are mine, and, if I had to use a bit of force at first, well—I have forgotten that, and I want you to forget it too. I will tell you what I am going to do. I am going to make you each a present of five thousand pounds' worth of shares in one or the other of my companies. And I am, in addition, going to lodge two hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of shares in each of your names. These latter you will hold only as nominees, but when the whole affair is made public, it will considerably alter the aspect of affairs. You will each appear to hold a position which will place you beyond the reach of criticism."

This proposal was received with enthusiasm and gratitude, and they all parted on the best of terms.

It was not long before the exposure became an accomplished fact. The *Northern Bulletin*, a paper of considerable influence and a large circulation in Yorkshire and Lancashire, was approached, not by Mr. Lampirthy, but, in accordance with a plan already agreed upon, by Mr. Mallard, as representative of a powerful combination of newspaper proprietors and papermakers.

Now the *Northern Bulletin*, which had every outward appearance of a prosperous newspaper, was, as a matter of

fact, on the verge of bankruptcy. Its days were already numbered, and having, therefore, nothing to lose by expiring a few weeks before its appointed time, it resolved to die gloriously. It flung the gauntlet in Mr. Mallard's face, and the day after the interview it published an account of the whole affair, containing all the facts and some very strong comments on the same. And for a week afterwards it devoted half of its columns to an attempt at exposing the whole business. But, owing to Mr. Lampirthy's foresight, it failed to prove anything beyond the fact that he and a large number of newspaper proprietors had combined to change the tone of the English Press.

During that brief week of glory the circulation rose like a thermometer placed in boiling water. Thousands of copies were sold in London; the exposure was the talk of England. As all the great newspapers were silent, the matter did not receive the advertisement which such an exposure requires. But, in spite of this, the provincial paper rose to an eminence which might have made its fortune, if it had lived. It died gloriously.

Ten days after the exposure the *Northern Bullet* ceased to exist. Thousands of people asked for it, but there were no copies to be had, for the simple reason that there was no paper to print it on. Its contract had expired. Like the bee, it had left its sting and died. The last copy was printed on calico. A few thousands of these fetched a shilling a copy, and were preserved as curiosities.

The exposure at first caused a little indignation. It also caused a good deal of amusement among the thoughtless and those most easily amused. Then there came a reaction among those who were capable of sober thought, and who had any religious or social ideals. It was recognized that Mr. Lampirthy and his associates were banded together to do a good work, and that they were sacrificing their own interests for the sake of a Cause.

It was not long before every one realized that the work

of these newspapers and the work of the mad preacher, Father Francis, were identical. Then it was seen that they were not only identical, but that there was a close and real connection between them. The name of Father Francis began to occupy a prominent position in the news of the day. He was praised as a stern and pure-minded zealot, as a great reformer.

It was also stated that Mr. Lampirthy, the richest man in the world, had been converted by the eloquence of this humble preacher; that the millionaire had given up his home of ease and luxury, and was now content with the bare necessities of life.

Here was a fact which could not be denied—a striking example of the value of the new teacher's doctrines. If Father Francis had persuaded the richest man in the world, not only to devote his wealth and intellect to the furtherance of his cause, but also to adopt a style of living which had hitherto been considered only fit for the labouring classes, there was surely something of value in this strange doctrine of simplicity. Mr. Lampirthy was known to be a hard-headed and clever financier, a man not at all likely to be moved by the rantings of an ordinary religious enthusiast. This Father Francis was undoubtedly a genius, and his words were worthy of consideration.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Lampirthy's new style of living was not entirely a tribute to the eloquence or even the prayers of the preacher. The millionaire had left the Carlton Hotel, and gone to live in a single room, which he had rented for three and sixpence a week, not because he felt that it was the right and proper thing for a man to do, but because he saw that it was the only logical outcome of the position in which he had placed himself. It strengthened his situation at the time of the exposure; it raised an unassailable bulwark against his adversaries. And, besides, it was not without attractions of its own. There was, at any rate, the novelty of a fresh experience.

But Mr. Lampirthy's work left little time for any consideration of personal comfort, and he slept as soundly in his mean little bedroom as he had ever done at the "Carlton." He was in the whirl of a great contest, and he had no time to think of anything else. He possessed a power which had shaken the whole of England, which had overthrown the newspaper traditions of a century, which was going to carry forward a movement that might revolutionize the world. Never before had he felt so keenly the extraordinary power of wealth, or the exultation of the man who fights with his money. In the long record of his life there had been many great victories, but none like this. In all the others there was the inevitable tale of ruin and shame and dishonour. In this alone could he point to a clear, honourable purpose. And though he was neither a good nor a religious man, this thought gave him both strength to fight and happiness at the result of his warfare. He often recalled the words Father Francis had spoken at their first interview.

"This is the sort of work a man will like to think about when he is dying." He realized that the preacher had spoken the truth.

XIII

THE LONELY HEIGHT

IN the meantime Father Francis moved along the path he had mapped out for himself, and looked neither to the right nor to the left. The fierce tumult of the newspaper warfare, the noise of change and destruction, which was attracting the attention of the world, only came to his ears as a faint echo.

Then reporters began to follow him, and, though they used their cameras with good results, they were unable to obtain an interview. He was as inaccessible as the King himself. He refused to say anything about either his work or his life. "When I speak," he said to the representative of a great paper, "I speak to all who choose to hear me. My message is to the world. You can listen to it."

Father Francis moved westward into the heart of Wales, and thence by easy stages to the coast of Cardiganshire. His journey through the principality was attended with scenes of the wildest enthusiasm. The Welsh, shrewd and practical enough in the conduct of business, are ever ready for the reception of a man who can stir their religious emotions. The whole country flocked to listen to the new preacher. He spoke less of the happiness to be gained in this world than of the terrors of the wrath to come. He cast off all restraint, and thousands listened to him with white faces and trembling limbs. Then there were scenes which surpass all power of description. Strong men wept and women fainted. Workers left their work to sing and shout and pray. Women left their children to dance and scream. Hysteria went hand in hand with madness. A

thousand homes were disorganized; business came to a standstill. And Father Francis moved through the land like a storm.

It was one night, after one of these scenes of enthusiasm, that he left his tent by the village at the foot of the mountain and climbed the steep slopes of a range that lay between him and the sea. He could not sleep; he felt a wild longing for the fresh air and soft stillness of the night.

When he reached the summit of the mountain, he looked down the further slope and gazed steadily at a few lights which twinkled in the distance. They were the lamps of Gaunt Royal.

As Father Francis looked across the valley towards his old home, his mind was stirred with a tumult of varying emotions. This mountain range was the limit beyond which he did not intend to pass. But he had climbed to the summit of Aran Cawddy that he might spend the night in meditation and prayer. Here, in sight of the scene where he had fallen into the lowest depths of hypocrisy, and drunkenness, and despair, he desired to chasten his soul and regain the humility which he had lost.

No sound came from the darkness of the heights of that lonely mountain. Two thousand feet beneath him one might have heard the roar of the waves on the rocks, the hoot of an owl in the woods, the bark of a dog in some farm-yard, the ripple of a stream. Here, on this barren scarp of rock, there was only silence.

It was on this mountain—almost on the very spot where he stood—that he had deceived Lady Betty Drake with the false declaration of his love.

How many years had passed since that day, how many centuries of progress from the degraded level of his past life. He had striven to do good in the world, and to atone for the past; but he could not forget. And, as he remembered, he knew that it was not good for him to forget. He

was now the leader of a great cause, a man who believed himself to be inspired by God. But it was well for him to remember what he once had been.

He did not spare himself in that lonely vigil on Aran Cawddy. He allowed his mind to dwell on the shame and sin of his past life. In the fierce labour of his great task he had had no time to think of Sir Richard Gaunt. But he had resolved to think of him to-night, and he had climbed up the summit of the mountain in order that he might face the terrors of the years that were dead and humble himself in his own sight.

And, as he stood there and gazed out into the sea of darkness, and watched the lights die one by one, till even Gaunt Royal itself was a single speck of flame, he realized how small a thing he was in the sight of God. He saw that all the good which he could possibly accomplish in the world would be outweighed by the evil he had done.

Father Francis fell upon his knees, and the jagged rock bit into his flesh. He knew that he could not hope to atone, that he could only pray for forgiveness.

The moon, which had moved upwards from the eastern horizon, lifted itself above the range of mountains, and flooded the valleys and the sea with its light. Father Francis saw the white radiance move towards him from the shore to the foot of the hills. Gaunt Royal itself stood out with all the ghastly brilliance of a marble tomb. The man prayed that it might indeed be the grave of his past, and that the dead bones would not rise up again to destroy him.

Then the dawn broke over the distant ranges of the mountains, and the eastern sky blazed from palest pink to molten gold. The great shadow of Aran Cawddy was flung out across the valley, and even darkened the waters of the sea itself. Then, as the uprising sun moved still higher into the heavens, its light streamed slantwise down the slope, and the whole scene glittered in the fresh, clear

air of a summer morning. But Father Francis still remained upon his knees and prayed.

Then at last, stiff and weary, he rose to his feet, and looked on the scene he knew so well. A thousand feet below him the naked earth began to put on a clothing of green wood and fertile fields. In the valley beneath farm-houses dotted the level plain. Far out at sea were the sails and the smoke of ships, carrying men and merchandise to and from all parts of the world.

But here, on the summit of the peak, all life and movement and vegetation had died. All round him lay grey masses of rock covered with lichen; a few yards away there was a sheer precipice, falling down for nearly two hundred feet; the grass was a scant brown herbage that was almost too coarse and tasteless for the mountain sheep. Nature has ordained that on the great heights, whence man can see far and clearly, there shall be none of the luxuriance of the valleys beneath.

Before his eyes Father Francis saw the symbol of his own life. Nearly all the land and all the farm-houses that lay beneath him were his own, if he chose to claim them. There was a good and sweet woman whom he could make his wife. The purest of all human joys was within his reach, if he chose to grasp it. But he had chosen to cut himself off from all earthly happiness and to stand upon a lonely height.

"I have chosen the path," he said to himself. "I will not look back. The past is dead."

He turned and stood for a moment while the sunshine streamed upon his face. It seemed to him an emblem of the future glory that was to shine upon him. His old sins, his dreams of earthly happiness lay behind in that valley which stretched between the mountains and the sea. Before him was only the work that he had set himself to do.

Little did he know that the scheme of the universe

moves in accordance with laws that no one can evade, and that neither repentance nor atonement can avert the punishment which must come to a man in this world. In the world to come he may find forgiveness and peace, but here on earth he must pay the penalty exacted by the laws which God Himself laid down in the beginning of all things.

He moved down the sunlit slope towards his little camp, and not till he was far below the summit did he look back. Then he only saw a jagged line of rock against the blue sky. He fancied he had thrust the past behind him.

XIV

THE PORTRAITS

MRS. LAMPIRTHY, after many useless tears and violent protestations, had been forced to accept the inevitable, and, a few days after her husband's first interview with Mr. Mallard, she moved the whole of her large establishment down to Watersmeet.

The great castle, which lay some fifty miles inland from Gaunt Royal, had only recently been purchased by her husband, and neither of them had as yet spent more than a few nights in the place.

Directly Mrs. Lampirthy installed herself in her new home she let every one know that things were going to be done with a regal splendour in keeping with her enormous wealth. She had an army of servants, thirty-two horses, and four motor-cars. She kept open house and lavished money in the district to such an extent that it became the Mecca of every vagabond in Wales.

Fifty years ago this woman would have had to cringe and toady to get into the best society. But ideas have changed since then. The toadying and the cringing are all on the other side now. The God of Wealth is supreme.

There was no lack of society round Watersmeet. The motor-car has so annihilated the distance between country houses that the possible circle of one's acquaintances is almost too large. The whirl of society is as fast and exhausting as in a London season. Friends, who live forty miles away, drop in to lunch, and go off again in the afternoon. They will come sixty miles for a dinner or a ball or a garden party.

Mrs. Lampirthy was called upon by every family of

note in the neighbourhood, and a few people came from a considerable distance to leave their cards.

Among those who came from afar to pay court at Watersmeet was Sir Henry Gaunt. He had once met Mr. Lampirthy over a business deal, and had every reason to regret the meeting; but he made this an excuse for calling and asking Mrs. Lampirthy to lunch.

The invitation was accepted, and Sibyl, who had been out riding in the park when Sir Henry and Lady Gaunt had made their call, accompanied her mother to Gaunt Royal.

The child's entrance into the drawing-room created something of a sensation. She wore a simple muslin dress, and her large white hat was tied down with a flowing motor-veil. Her small face, rosy with the rush of the air against her cheeks, looked very lovely in its setting of white lawn and golden hair. She was one of the most beautiful children in England, and unfortunately she knew it.

Mrs. Lampirthy was not surprised when she saw the look of amazement on the face of her hostess as the latter shook hands with the little girl. She was accustomed to this tribute of admiration. Wherever little Sibyl Lampirthy went she attracted attention.

"Why, Harry," cried Lady Gaunt to her husband, "did you ever see such a likeness? It's absurd!"

Sir Henry Gaunt nodded. He was not listening and did not understand. He was wondering who would be fortunate enough to capture this prize in a few years' time. Mrs. Lampirthy stared inquiringly at her hostess.

"She's the very image," said Lady Gaunt. "I must show you the picture now—before lunch. Come into the Long Gallery. We call it that, but it's nothing but a passage, with windows down one side. Come with me, dear. I'll show you the picture you've stepped out of."

They entered the Long Gallery and paused before a

portrait. Sibyl clapped her hands with delight and earned a look of reproof from her mother. Sir Henry Gaunt smiled approvingly as though he were responsible for the whole surprise. Lady Gaunt pointed to a gilt tablet screwed to the frame, which bore the name of "Gladys Gaunt." Mrs. Lampirthy looked from the picture to her daughter and then back again to the picture. The resemblance was certainly extraordinary, but the advantage was all on the side of the living child.

"What an odd coincidence," said Mrs. Lampirthy with a smile. "But what a shame to dress the poor child like that. I suppose she is an old woman by now."

"She would have been," said Sir Henry gravely, "if she had lived. But she died before she was twenty-one."

Mrs. Lampirthy shuddered, and she took hold of Sibyl's arm. The child was excited at seeing herself in a sort of fancy costume, and chattered volubly. Then the tones of a gong vibrated through the house, and they all went in to lunch.

When the meal was over, Lady Gaunt, who had conceived a strong liking for Sibyl, offered to take the child round the grounds and along the edge of the cliff. Mrs. Lampirthy had no desire for such violent and unnecessary exercise, and she preferred to endure the studied and precise conversation of Sir Henry, finding compensation in the softness of an arm-chair.

Sir Henry, being a man of no tact, started a lengthy disquisition on the antiquity of his family, and the part they had played in the making of history. Mrs. Lampirthy reposed quietly in her seat, and tried to take an interest in a certain Sir Richard Gaunt, who had done something or other in the Middle Ages. The man's voice seemed to hum on like a threshing machine. She caught occasional words, "a chief embattled, party per pale argent and azure." "He won his spurs at Poitiers." "My brother, you know, poor chap." "The *Santigan* was lost with all

hands"—and so on, until the droning ceased, and looking up she saw Sir Henry Gaunt standing before her with a faded photograph in his hands.

"That's poor Dick," he said in a tone of dignified sorrow, "as good a chap as ever there was."

Mrs. Lampirthy roused herself to a contemplation of the ancient photograph which was thrust into her hands. She was not pleased at the interruption. Sir Henry's conversation only required an occasional "Yes" or "No" to keep it flowing at a rate which obviated all necessity for comment. But here was something tangible and concrete, something that required a remark showing an intelligent interest in the photograph.

She stared at the portrait, yellow with age, and the name of the photographer, who had taken it. She knew the face, but she could not understand why it was suddenly thrust before her notice, why it had flashed out of the darkness of fifteen years. Her small, pretty face grew old and haggard, and her hands trembled. She knew that she had to say something, and she did not know what to say.

"Yes," she muttered feebly; "oh, yes, of course."

Sir Henry Gaunt, full of the greatness of his family, did not notice her confusion. He was, fortunately, fond of repeating himself, in order to emphasize the value of his statements.

"Sir Richard Gaunt," he said proudly, "as good a chap as ever there was. The wreck of the *Santigan*—you remember it. I dare say he died as nobly as his ancestors before him. We have none of us ever been afraid to face death."

Mrs. Lampirthy collected her thoughts, and gazed at the portrait, as though it were the face of a dead friend. The man, whoever he was, was dead. That much was certain. Yet there was a good deal that she wished to learn about him.

"Your brother?" she said with a look of sympathy. "How sad! Oh, yes, of course, I remember the wreck of the *Santigan*. But this is an old portrait. It is so faded."

"It was taken fourteen years ago," said Sir Henry solemnly. "It is the last we have of him. He couldn't bear being photographed. I often wish we had a picture to place with the others of our race."

"Oh, yes, what a pity you haven't," said Mrs. Lampirthy. She was thinking of the other picture which hung in the Long Gallery. She understood why Sibyl was so like the portrait of Gladys Gaunt.

"Yes, that is poor Dick," said Sir Henry, taking the photograph from her hands. "A good chap, a bit wild, but generous, and high-spirited. I dare say, Mrs. Lampirthy, you will hear ill of my poor brother in these parts, but believe me when I say that he had all the fighting spirit of our race."

"It is most interesting," said Mrs. Lampirthy, with an effort at well-bred indifference. "It must be a great thing to belong to a family which fought—where was it that Sir Richard Gaunt fought—?"

"Poitiers," said Sir Henry, with a smile. "But there, Mrs. Lampirthy, I've bored you. I am an old fossil. I dare say you've been laughing at me all the time."

"Laughing?" said Mrs. Lampirthy, with a face so ghastly that it forbade any thought of mirth. "Oh, no, Sir Henry. I have been most interested. But where is Sibyl? We ought to making a start. She has some children coming in to tea."

Sir Henry Gaunt walked over to one of the windows and looked across the lawns.

"I don't see them, Mrs. Lampirthy—oh, yes, they're on the cliffs. Come outside and look through the telescope."

Mrs. Lampirthy followed him on to a broad veranda, and placed her eye to the telescope. She saw her daughter

clinging to the arm of Lady Gaunt, and the sight did not please her.

"They'll be back in ten minutes," said Sir Henry, "and you'll be home in an hour. I suppose you can do the thirty miles in the hour—no policemen about here in the daytime. They're out all night after poachers, and sleep most of the day. By the by, I suppose you saw nothing of that preaching fellow on your way here. The police have had a nice job with him from first to last."

Mrs. Lampirthy made no reply. Her eyes were fixed on her daughter and Lady Gaunt. She was wondering why the child moved so slowly. Sir Henry, a little piqued at her inattention, rang the bell, and gave instructions about the motor.

A quarter of an hour later the powerful car was tearing up and down the hills which lay between Watersmeet and Gaunt Royal. Sibyl chattered like a small sparrow. Child-like, she was full of enthusiasm for her newly-found friend.

Mrs. Lampirthy heard nothing but the quick pulse and throb of the engines. The car seemed to be saying the same three words again and again in untiring monotony of rhythm:

"He is dead. He is dead. He is dead. He is dead."
That was all the car had to say on the matter.

XV

THE FIRST MARTYR

WHEN Mrs. Lampirthy reached Watersmeet, she went to her private boudoir, and told the servants that she was not at home to any one who might call. She was not in the humour to talk to strangers. She gave instructions that Sibyl was to act as hostess to the children who had been asked to tea, and the child was jubilant at the idea of posing as mistress of the house.

Mrs. Lampirthy had much to occupy her thoughts on that summer afternoon. The first shock of the discovery was succeeded by a feeling of relief, and even of gratitude. For more than fourteen years the folly of her childhood had shadowed her life, and had changed her from a silly, light-headed girl to a hard, pleasure-loving woman of the world.

More than fourteen years ago Henry Rankin—which was the name Sir Richard Gaunt had evidently assumed for this particular amour—had given her a thousand pounds and packed her off to America to hide her shame.

In New York she had made the acquaintance of a man of humble position, who had fallen in love with her and offered her marriage. She told as much of her story as it was necessary for him to know, and his only reply was to repeat his offer of marriage. She accepted this shelter from the storm that was gathering about her head, and, when Sibyl was born, the child was registered as the daughter of Arthur and Violet Brackley.

The marriage, as might have been expected from the circumstances, was not a happy one. Arthur Brackley,

who was a workman earning ten dollars a week, soon repented of his heroism. He found the woman he looked upon as the ideal of his humble mind to be vain, shallow, untruthful, and utterly unscrupulous.

A year and a half after Sibyl's birth he was killed by the fall of a girder in a new building where he was working as a bricklayer. His employer paid the widow two-thousand dollars compensation, and Mrs. Brackley, who had still kept most of her thousand pounds intact, was in no danger of immediate want.

Then Mr. Lampirthy had come upon the scene. At that time he was merely looked upon as a smart man who was likely to get on in the world, and he had not yet done more than lay the foundations of the huge fortune which came to him in the next ten years. Mrs. Brackley deliberately set to work to capture him for a husband, and she was successful. Although she could not accurately be described as a woman who would inspire a man to rise in the world, yet her love of luxury and her constant demands for money acted as incentives to the man who was struggling for the possession of great wealth. She never allowed him to rest. If he made a million dollars, she pointed out to him that he might make another million. And he went and made it. For a time she spent most of his earnings. And he did not feel himself a free man till he had a fortune that she could not dissipate.

Such was the story of Violet Hexamer, the woman for whom George Crawshay had spent ten years of his life. If he had known the truth, he might have been less eager in his search for the betrayer, and he might never have bequeathed his legacy of vengeance to another man. But he knew nothing of the truth. He supposed, and he had every reason to suppose, that the betrayed woman had sunk into the lowest depths of shame, that she had died of grief and starvation. He certainly did not imagine that she had triumphed over her first and only

mistake, and had risen to a position that was the envy of half the women in the world.

Violet Lampirthy had no reason to be dissatisfied with the use she had made of her life. She had come out "on top." But through all these years of luxury and splendour there had always been a shadow in her sky. She had no regret for the past. Her hard, worldly little mind was never troubled by the pangs of conscience. But she was afraid of the man who had dishonoured her, afraid lest he should once more come into her life and break down the splendid edifice which she had reared from the wreck of her soul. A word from his lips might destroy all her happiness. Mr. Lampirthy knew nothing of his wife, save that she had been married to a poor and honest working man, and that Sibyl was the only child of this marriage.

This fear of the man's reappearance had given birth to a hatred, which was almost incredible in a shallow and frivolous mind. Mrs. Lampirthy loathed Henry Rankin with more than the bitterness of a betrayed woman. Only those who are afraid can hate with such an insensate fury as she felt towards one who had proved himself her master.

But now, as she sat in her boudoir, thoughtfully sipping a cup of tea which the maid had placed on a table by her side, the shadow was passing from her life. The man was dead. He had no further power to do harm in this world. She smiled at the thought of her freedom, and she was not ill-pleased to have learnt that Sibyl's father was not a nameless adventurer, but the head of a great and ancient family. There was no regret at the thought that she herself might have been mistress of Gaunt Royal. Mr. Lampirthy's income for a month would have purchased the whole estate.

Her reverie was interrupted by the entrance of a servant with a leather letter-bag. The second post was al-

ways brought over to Watersmeet from the nearest town by special messenger, as there was only one delivery a day.

She unlocked the bag and drew out a handful of letters, a newspaper, and several large circulars. She recognized the handwriting of her husband on one of the envelopes, and she gave his communication precedence over all others. She had written to him asking for a large cheque, as she had overdrawn her private account.

The letter ran as follows:

“DEAR VIOLET,—I am sorry I cannot send you the cheque you ask for, but all my available income is being used in my present work. I am myself living on sixteen shillings a week, and the life is doing me a lot of good. I hope to be able to persuade you and Sibyl to follow my example. If you read the enclosed paper, you will see the nature of the work on which I am engaged, and you will understand that your present mode of living is very detrimental both to my own interests and to those of the worthy man whom I am proud to call my friend. May I suggest a little entrenchment in your expenditure? Your private income is surely sufficient for all your wants. But I will talk to you about this when I come down next week.—I am, your affectionate husband,
HARRY.

“P. S.—Father Francis is now in the neighbourhood of Watersmeet. I have asked him to call and see you. I trust you will receive him with every courtesy.”

Mrs. Lampirthy's face flushed with anger as she read this letter. Then she opened the newspaper, which was the momentous copy of the *Northern Bullet*.

She read every word of the eight columns devoted to Mr. Lampirthy and the Paper Combine, and when she had finished, she understood why she had received no cheque.

So all this newspaper madness, of which she had heard so much, was the work of her own husband. He had been fooled and tricked into this by a mere charlatan of a preacher, by a man without a decent coat to his

back, without even a name. And in order that this maniac might have the funds to pay his deluded converts, and coerce powerful newspapers, she and Sibyl were to be stinted in all that they had every right to expect.

She rose to her feet, tore the letter into a dozen pieces, threw the newspaper on the floor, and walked to the window, with clenched hands, and a desire to strike some one in the face.

"Mad!" she said to herself. "He must be mad! But I'll get even with this thief who is robbing him."

She bit her lips and stared out of the window across the lawns and trees of the park. In the distance she could see the spire of the village church, and beyond that the slope of a great mountain. Near the foot of the slope she saw a few white tents and small black figures that moved to and fro.

She turned away from the window and rang the bell. It was answered by her own maid, who was the only servant permitted to enter the boudoir.

"Is Father Francis in the village, Haines?"

"Yes, madam."

"Does he live in those tents over there?"

"Yes, madam."

"Have you been to any of his meetings?"

"No, madam—not yet, but I was thinking to-night—if it stays fine——"

"You're not to go, and please tell Mr. Morgan, the steward, to give orders that no one in this house is to go to any of the meetings."

"Yes, madam."

"If I hear of any one disobeying my order, I shall dismiss them at once."

"Yes, madam."

The maid left the room, but before she had closed the door, she was met by a footman, and there were a

few whispered words between them. She returned into the room.

"If you please, madam," she said timidly, "he's come to see you himself."

"He?" queried Mrs. Lampirthy sharply. "Who do you mean?"

"This Father Francis, madam. He is waiting downstairs to see you."

"Tell the men to whip him off the premises," said Mrs. Lampirthy. Then she remembered that, although she lived in a feudal castle, she was amenable to the laws of civilization.

"I mean," she continued, as the maid stared blankly, in response to this peculiar order, "tell him I cannot see him. I am busy—engaged."

In two or three minutes the girl returned and handed Mrs. Lampirthy a note.

As she read it, she frowned.

"Tell the man I will see him," she said abruptly, "in the library."

Mrs. Lampirthy greeted her visitor with a slight bow, and the expression on her face was one that did not promise well for the success of any interview. It was distinctly hostile.

"I'm afraid I've taken a liberty," he said quickly, "but this is a matter of life and death. One of my comrades is very ill. There is no doctor within fifteen miles of this place. If you would lend me one of your motor-cars, it might save a man's life."

Mrs. Lampirthy hesitated. She had every reason to hate the man who was, as she thought, robbing her husband of his money. If some one else had come to her for a car to save the life of Father Francis, she would have replied, with the ready excuse of all motorists, that her motor-cars were out of order. But this request was another matter. The favour was asked for a stranger—possibly a

dupe of the charlatan who stood before her. And though the woman was vain, worldly, and shallow, she was capable of womanly pity.

"Who is the man?" she asked. "Is it any one from this neighborhood?"

"No. His name is Harry Brandon. He is a London man. He is dying. If you grant me this favour, he may be saved. I am sure Mr. Lampirthy would wish it."

At the mention of her husband's name Mrs. Lampirthy stiffened into an attitude of defiance. The man's words sounded like a threat.

"Mr. Lampirthy leaves the management of this house to me," she replied coldly. "Our motor-cars have all been going wrong lately; I——"

"You only came back on one this afternoon," he said. "Surely that one——"

"I should like to oblige you——" she began, in the tone of one who is casting about for some excuse.

"Surely you do not understand," he broke in fiercely. "This man is dying; on one of your motor-cars we might be able to fetch a doctor and be back here in a little over an hour. Every minute is of value. While I stand here talking to you the man is dying. Don't you understand?"

Mrs. Lampirthy was as unwarmed by his words as an iceberg in the glare of the sun. She was thinking of the foolhardy and ridiculous enterprise into which her husband had been dragged by this man.

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you," she said coldly, "but our cars——"

"If Mr. Lampirthy were to know of this," he muttered—"if only Mr. Lampirthy were to know of this."

He could not have spoken any words more calculated to harden the heart of this woman. His request might have been granted at once but for his first mention of the millionaire. This last reference to Mr. Lampirthy was fatal.

"I am sorry," she said, with a smile, "but these motor-cars—after all, I think it is best to rely on horses."

The man's eyes blazed with fury, and wild words rose to his lips.

But, before he could utter them, the door opened, and Sibyl peered through the opening.

"Mother," she began, but Mrs. Lampirthy's face was not an encouragement to proceed.

"Go out of the room at once, Sibyl," she exclaimed. "Can't you see I'm engaged?" The child withdrew and closed the door with a bang.

Father Francis stood motionless. The entrance of the child had recalled the picture at Gaunt Royal and a buried incident in the past. He scrutinized the face of the woman, who was going to let a man die to gratify her pique or some crooked whim of her worldly mind. In an instant he resolved to loose his bow at a venture. The arrow might reach his own heart, But there was no time to think of self. A man was dying, and this woman could save him.

"I once knew a man," he said in a low voice, "whose heart was as pitiless as yours. But God punished him, and brought him to the dust, as He will bring you to the dust one day. The name of this man was Henry Rankin——"

He paused and watched the effect of the name on the woman's face. She betrayed herself.

"Henry Rankin?" she said quickly. "I don't know him. Why do you mention his name? What are you talking about?"

"I did not say that you knew him—but I am not going to waste time in talking to you about him. Young Brandon is dying. If you do not let me have a motor-car in five minutes from now, I shall tell Mr. Lampirthy all that I know about Henry Rankin and Violet Hexamer."

"You are mad!" she exclaimed. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"You lie," he said quietly, and he looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. The woman confronted him with a look of fear. She could control her face, but the truth was written in her eyes.

"Must I get the servants to turn you out?" she said haughtily.

"You will not do so," he replied. "One minute has passed. Is there no pity in your heart for this poor young chap who is dying? It is not much that I ask of you."

She rang the bell, and a footman entered.

"Tell Williams to bring round the big Mercedes car at once," she said. "He's to go for a doctor. It is a matter of life and death."

The man departed, and Mrs. Lampirthy turned to Father Francis.

"Now, then," she said fiercely, "I have done what you want. In return, please tell me what you know about Henry Rankin and Violet Hexamer."

"The man is dead," he replied gravely. "His real name was Sir Richard Gaunt. He went down in the wreck of the *Santigan*. You have nothing to fear from him—or from me. I should not have spoken, except in the hope of saving a man's life."

"Who are you?" she cried, her fear getting the better of her judgment. "What is it that you know?"

"I knew both Henry Rankin and Violet Hexamer," he replied. "The man was punished for his 'sins. The woman is still alive. She has many years in which to make atonement. Yet the years slip by very quickly, and the day of judgment is at hand."

A stream of crimson light from one of the stained glass windows tinged his stern face with blood. In this room, once the banqueting hall of the Caerlyns, he was seen

to advantage. Mrs. Lampirthy felt small and out of place. He was in the picture and she was not. Whoever he was, he was a man to be feared and conciliated, and amid his present surroundings he loomed up like some great religious fighter from the past—fierce, rugged, and pitiless, neither capable of fear nor mercy. For the first time in her life Mrs. Lampirthy felt that wealth was not the greatest power in the world.

“I do not know who you are,” she said, after a long silence, “nor why you speak to me like this. But I wish you well, and you owe much to my husband.”

“You speak the truth,” he replied. “Yet I do not know that my duty to him demands my silence. Perhaps it would be right for me to speak. It is clear that he does not know.”

Mrs. Lampirthy lost all control over herself, and, catching hold of his arm, clung to it, and looked up into the dark bearded face.

“I was very young,” she cried, “scarcely more than a child—the sin was not mine.”

“No,” he replied gravely, “it was not yours. It was the sin of the man. He has suffered for it. It led him into hell, and he died.”

“What must I pay?” she cried. “What do you ask?”

“I ask nothing,” he replied. “I should not have spoken, save for the sake of my poor brother and comrade. Yet I must speak the words that are in my mind. By myself I am nothing, but I speak to you with the voice of One Who is greater than all the universe. In your hands lies the power to do much good in the world. I only ask you to devote yourself to the great cause in which Mr. Lampirthy has already laboured so unselfishly and so well.”

“And if I do not?” she queried, with a look of fear.

“If you do not,” he continued, “I shall not judge

you, but God, Who has given to all men and women a chance to atone for their sins, will be your judge."

She moved slowly away from him, a poor, pitiful figure of a woman. Then she turned on him in a burst of anger, and her small, mean soul stood naked in the light of her words.

The door opened, and a footman entered.

"The motor-car is at the door, madam."

"Would you care to go with the chauffeur, Father Francis?" asked Mrs. Lampirthy in a tone of ordinary politeness.

"Yes," he replied, "it is better that I should go. I can take the doctor straight to his patient, and answer his questions on the way. Yes, I will certainly go."

She accompanied him to the door, where the great 60-horsepower Mercedes trembling like a horse at the starting-post.

"You will be cold," she said, as she looked at his brown serge robe. "Fetch an overcoat, Andrews; you will find one of the master's in the anteroom."

"No, thank you," said Father Francis; "it's a warm night."

"How far is it to Aberllyn, Williams?" asked Mrs. Lampirthy, as the two men seated themselves in the motor-car.

"Seventeen miles, madam."

"How long will you take?"

"Twenty-five minutes, madam, with a clear road and no police."

"Don't mind the police, Williams. I'll pay the fines. Get there in twenty minutes if you can."

The man grinned and touched his cap. And the next moment the vibration ceased, the car slid swiftly forwards, and disappeared round a bend in the drive.

Mrs. Lampirthy stood for a moment on the steps until the hum of the machinery had died away in the distance.

"I hope they will break their necks," she said piously, as she returned into the house.

Mrs. Lampirthy's prayer was not answered. In an hour and ten minutes the motor returned to the village with Dr. Parry of Aberllyn.

But before they reached the little camp, a ragged long-haired preacher came out to meet them. They learnt from him that Harry Brandon was dead.

"Overwork, exposure, and a body not used to this sort of life," was the doctor's verdict.

"The first martyr in our Cause," replied Father Francis sternly. "God will reward him." Then he knelt on the ground and prayed.

XVI

DR. MORGAN OF PEN-Y-BONT

"No expense is to be spared," said Mr. Lampirthy; "the life of this man must be saved. Get in any specialist you like. I'll pay all expenses."

Father Francis was seriously ill. Within twelve hours after his return from Aberllyn he complained of pains in his chest and back. Dr. Parry was called in, and told the patient that he had an attack of influenza. But within a few hours there were symptoms of pneumonia. The doctor said that possibly the fierce ride on the motor-car through the night air was responsible for a chill, and that the preacher's body, worn out by physical exertions and self-denials, was too weak to fight against the most trifling illness. Mr. Lampirthy had been telegraphed for. The message had not been sent by Mrs. Lampirthy, but by Dr. Parry.

"I think we can save his life," the doctor said gravely. "But there are symptoms of brain fever, and possibly his brain may suffer. May I wire for Sir David Llewellyn from Cardiff. There is no better man in London."

"Yes," Mr. Lampirthy replied; "send for him at once, and, if there's another doctor handy, get him as well. One of you must be in constant attendance. You can take it in turns. I'll make it worth your while."

"There is Dr. Morgan at Pen-y-bont; he is not very busy at this time of the year."

"Send for him at once."

The doctor sat down and wrote out two telegrams. This case promised to be a gold mine, and he was glad to do a good turn to an old friend. There was only a

bare living to be picked up in this sparsely populated mountain district of Wales, and the Welsh people were not generous patients. The fees for this case alone might easily exceed all that he had earned in the first six months of the year.

The telegrams were dispatched, and Mr. Lampirthy, who had driven straight from a distant station to the "White Lion," made his way up to Watersmeet.

"How is your patient?" asked Mrs. Lampirthy.

"He is very ill. He may die; and he may lose his reason, if he lives."

"He hadn't much to lose, poor fellow," Mrs. Lampirthy replied, with a sickly smile—the result of joy battling with pretended sorrow for the control of her features.

"You think not?" said Mr. Lampirthy. "Ah, that reminds me that I want to have a little business chat with you, Violet. In your last letter——"

She rose to her feet and pressed her hands to her ears.

"Don't talk to me of it now," she cried. "I won't listen to your lectures. I've been worried enough. You're behaving like a brute to me."

Mr. Lampirthy shrugged his shoulders and left the room. His wife dined alone in her boudoir that night, and he consumed his meal in the solitary grandeur of the great banqueting hall. When he had finished, he lit a cigar and walked through the village to the encampment by the river.

He found the little colony of preachers on their knees in the moonlight. Not a word came from their lips, but he knew the object of their prayers. He did not kneel with them, but bared his head and waited.

When at last, after a long silence, they rose to their feet, he went among them and spoke a few words of practical comfort. He told them that, if human skill and science were of any avail, their leader would be spared to them.

One young enthusiast rebuked him, saying that life and death were in the hands of God alone.

"True, my friend," Mr. Lampirthy replied, "but man is expected to do the best in his power. I have done my best. Go on with your prayers. Doubtless they are as valuable as anything I can give."

He turned and left them, and, as he neared the "White Lion," he heard the faint music of a funeral hymn rising into the summer night. He paused and listened. The preachers had ceased to pray for the life of Father Francis; they were singing a requiem for the lad who had died the day before.

Mr. Lampirthy entered the inn, and was shown into the sitting-room which had been reserved for Dr. Parry. When the doctor had given an account of his patient's condition, Mr. Lampirthy turned the conversation to Harry Brandon.

"Oh, yes," the doctor said quickly, "without doubt his death was due to the conditions of his life. He had, so Father Francis told me on the way here, been in a shop most of his life. You can't take a fellow of that sort and expect him to live in the open air in all weathers and sleep in a tent at night. He ought to have been moved to a house directly he was taken ill; then we might have saved him."

"In other words," said Mr. Lampirthy, "he died at the post of duty—the first martyr to the Cause."

"Has this Father Francis any relations?" said the doctor, unwilling to offend Mr. Lampirthy by what he longed to say about the Cause. "What is his real name?"

"I don't know," Mr. Lampirthy replied; and then he remembered something.

"His relations should be sent for," said Dr. Parry. "His condition is very serious."

"I know nothing of them. He has never even told me his name."

The next day Sir David Llewellyn arrived from Cardiff.

The great physician advised the clipping of the patient's luxurious locks and the removal of the beard and all the hair on the face. The weather was hot and oppressive, and it was necessary that the man's head should be kept as cool as possible.

Dr. Parry was much amused at the change thus wrought in the appearance of the great preacher.

"I'm afraid you've destroyed one of his chief assets," he said to Sir David; "he'll no longer look like a prophet from the Old Testament."

"He is not so picturesque," said Sir David drily, "but he will be more comfortable."

"I'm afraid he won't be a success till his hair grows again. Do you think his brain will be all right, Sir David?"

"I am not sure. He seems to have been a crack-brained, excitable sort of chap, and it takes very little to disturb the mental balance of a man like that. But I see no reason why he shouldn't live for many years—with care."

"Ah, yes, Sir David, as you say, with care. You've doubtless noticed, as I did——"

"Yes, Dr. Parry. He is not a sound man. It is a terrible thing to speak evil of a man like this, but, of course, we are talking professionally."

"Of course, Sir David."

"Well, this man has lived a hard life in his early days. You understand?"

Dr. Parry nodded.

"Under ordinary circumstances this would not matter, for he has naturally a fine constitution. But he has been putting a terrible strain on it—a strain that might break the strongest constitution. All this preaching, this enthusiasm, this wild excitement, this life of hardship and self-denial—it's bound to find out the weak spot in a man's system, just as the Oxford and Cambridge boat race finds

out the weak spot in a fellow that looks and feels the picture of health."

"And you think that the weak spot——?"

"It may be in his brain or his body. In any case, he must give up this life."

"I'm afraid he won't do so, Sir David. He will count his life or his sanity as nothing. He fancies he has a mission to fulfil. Of course, you know all about it."

"Oh, yes. The papers are full of it. People are talking of nothing else. But he'll have to give it up—he'll have to give it up. Well, I don't think there is any need for me to stay; you know what to do as well as I, and you are as capable of doing it. The two nurses will be here to-night. They've both had a case of this sort before, and are thoroughly reliable. If you should want me, I can probably come down with a few hours' notice."

The patient began to mutter in his drugged sleep, and both doctors looked at the bed where he was lying.

"There's bound to be a little of that," said Sir David. "It will pass off. I see Mr. Lampirthy's motor-car is waiting for me."

"Good-bye, Sir David."

"Good-bye, Dr. Parry. Write and let me know how he gets along."

The great physician left, and the country doctor went to the bedside of the patient. Father Francis was talking incoherently.

"H'm," said the doctor to himself, "if this man has a secret, it ought to come out. It might be useful—no, I'm not quite so hard up as all that. But still, some one must hear what he is talking about."

There had been many conjectures as to the real name of the man who called himself Father Francis. The truth would be worth a thousand pounds to any newspaper.

But the words of the patient revealed nothing of his past life. They formed an incoherent jumble of prayer and exhortation and confession of sin.

Then, after a little while, the voice became more distinct, and the sentences more intelligible.

"I see the end," cried the sick man. "It is near. Down the dark slope of space spins a ball of fire. It breaks, it crumbles, it vanishes in a blaze of light. All is darkness. All is silent, save for the beating of wings, and the cold rush of air from some chasm in the universe. The earth is not; there is nothing left save the souls of men whirled hither and thither like specks of dust in a storm."

Dr. Parry smiled. He recognized the origin of the idea. It sprang from the rush of the motor-car down the dark slope of the mountain, from the blaze of the lamps, from the hum of the machinery.

"There is nothing to cling to," the voice continued; "no foothold for my feet, nothing that I can clutch with my hands. I am sinking, falling. Is there no bottom to this abyss? Where are the others? Ah! there, above me, some dropping like dead leaves from a tree, others rising like white feathers wafted heavenwards. But I am beneath them all. I am the lowest, and alone. O God, stretch out Thy hand to me; let me save myself before I fall out of Thy sight."

Dr. Parry shuddered. He was not an imaginative man, but he understood the wild fancy of his patient's brain. He saw the dark expanse of space, the end of the earth, the last foothold of the physical body, the scattering of a thousand million souls into a great void, the long and endless fall of this one into unfathomable depths of darkness, the loneliness and terror of the soul that is passing out of the sight of God.

He went to a small table, poured out a dose of medicine, and forced the man's mouth open to receive it. After that there was silence.

The nurses arrived by an afternoon train, and later on in the evening Dr. Morgan came over from Pen-y-bont.

The two friends had not met for over a year, and they had much to talk about. But the patient was naturally uppermost in their thoughts, and after a word or two of greeting Dr. Parry explained the accident, the nature of Sir David's operation, and everything which was of interest to a brother physician.

"There's money in this, Dick," he said, "or I wouldn't have sent for you. Of course, you've heard all about this fellow, Father Francis, and Mr. Lampirthy. No expense is to be spared—no expense, Dick. Ten guineas a day for each of us, and two hundred pounds each if the man's life is saved."

"Oh, we'll save him," said Dr. Morgan, with a hearty laugh; "though I expect he's rather an expensive luxury for the millionaire, eh? I read in some paper the other day that Mr. Lampirthy had already spent seventeen million pounds on this hobby of his."

"Very likely, but the man won't cost him much more. It is possible he may never recover his reason."

"I doubt if he's ever had it," Dr. Morgan answered, with a cheerful smile. "But, if he goes clean off his head, it will be all the better for his work. There's nothing that these Revivalists like better than a stark madman. They think he's inspired."

"They are not alone in their belief. In many countries the words of madmen are listened to with superstitious reverence. It is not unreasonable to suppose that when a man has lost all power of coherent thought, and when his own brain has, so to speak, no power of resistance, that he should become a medium for thoughts and utterances which come from a higher world."

"All nonsense," said Dr. Morgan decisively. "You were always full of these strange ideas. I remember, Owen, when we were at Guy's together, that you——"

"Shall we go and see the patient?" interrupted Dr. Parry. "I'm going to leave you here to-night. I must go back to Aberllyn and devote to-morrow to my other patients."

"Have you got any? I haven't, except a few poor people who think sixpence for medical advice an extravagance. I've never had but one big patient in my life, and he's dead."

"I don't wonder!" retorted Parry, with a grin.

"Oh, not my fault. I didn't kill him. He was drowned on the *Santigan*—I dare say you remember it. It was I who advised him to go a voyage for his health."

"Poor fellow!"

"Oh, well, if he hadn't gone, he'd have killed himself with drink, so it didn't matter much. He was a wild lot, if ever there was one. Well, lead the way, Owen."

Dr. Owen Parry led the way into the patient's room.

"A most extraordinary story," said Mr. Lampirthy, looking at the ceiling through a cloud of tobacco smoke, "and, to tell you the truth, Dr. Morgan, I think you have made a mistake."

"Impossible," replied the young doctor. "I knew Sir Richard Gaunt well by sight. I attended him for a month at Gaunt Royal. It was I who advised him to take a voyage on the *Santigan*. How he was saved I don't know, I can't possibly guess. But the man, who is lying down there in the 'White Lion,' is Sir Richard Gaunt. I could get a dozen people to swear to it."

"You had better not," said Mr. Lampirthy coldly. "You will find it to your interest to keep your mouth shut. I think you have made a mistake. But if your wild story is true, you'd better keep it to yourself. If you talk about it, Sir Henry Gaunt will not thank you, nor shall I thank you; and Father Francis, if he lives—well, there is no saying what he might do."

"I have no wish to say anything," replied the doctor sharply. "It is certainly not my duty to make mischief. If this man, for reasons which I can well understand, wishes to conceal his identity——"

"I wish it," interrupted Mr. Lampirthy, "or rather, I wish you not to give utterance to this wild idea of yours. I will endeavour to show you that silence will be in the best interests of us all, even yourself."

"Thank you," said Dr. Morgan stiffly, "in a matter of this sort——"

"Don't be an ass!" exclaimed Mr. Lampirthy. "You are rendering me a special service in coming over here all the way from Pen-y-bont. Your practice will suffer. I shall, of course, make all this good—in proportion to your services. I understand that you did not tell your friend Dr. Parry of this extraordinary resemblance."

"No, I did not tell him."

"How was that? He is a great friend of yours, is he not?"

"Yes, but I thought I'd better see you first. I did not quite understand. I thought that perhaps——"

"You acted very wisely. I have every confidence in you, Dr. Morgan. I think, as I say, that you must be mistaken. It is possible you are not; but in either case you will see the necessity for silence."

The doctor bowed and left the room. When he had gone, Mr. Lampirthy frowned, and, opening his pocket-book, took out a small torn slip of paper on which Father Francis had written the name of "Gaunt."

He had said nothing about this to Dr. Morgan. He had scoffed at the idea that Father Francis was the same man as the Sir Richard Gaunt who had been lost in the *Santigan* five years before. But during the whole interview he knew that the story was true.

Without doubt the great preacher and reformer was the same man who, some years previously, had scandalized

London with his excesses. Mr. Lampirthy had never known Sir Richard Gaunt, but in those days the rake's name was often on the lips of those who dearly love a scandal. Mr. Lampirthy had for three years running spent six months of each year in London on business. He had been brought into contact with many society people. He had often heard of Sir Richard Gaunt.

And this was the man, the ardent enthusiast, who had persuaded him to sink his millions in the furtherance of a great cause. "Rakehell" Gaunt was the preacher who had moved thousands to turn from the sordid pursuit of money to the truer life of simplicity and godliness, and the calm contemplation of nobler things than wealth. This man, who once had been excluded from the houses of people that were not over particular in the selection of their friends, was now regarded as a great-souled and holy-minded saint, as a prophet of God speaking divine words through human lips.

The discovery was one which might well stagger the intellect of the coolest and most practical man of business. Yet the situation had to be faced. Dr. Morgan would be silent. He was a poor struggling physician, and, as he would not violate any principles of honour or justice by keeping his mouth shut, there was every reason why he should accede to Mr. Lampirthy's wishes in the matter. But was it possible for the secret to be kept? When the sick man recovered and faced the world again, there was every chance of recognition. His hair and beard would scarcely have grown to more than a thick stubble. His face was well known in the district. It was fortunate that Dr. Parry had only come to Aberllyn two years previously. But there would be many who would recognize the late owner of Gaunt Royal. There was his brother, now in possession of the estates; there were farmers, tradesmen, labourers, all of whom would know the face of Sir Richard Gaunt.

Mr. Lampirthy asked himself what would happen if this secret, which Father Francis himself had so carefully preserved, should become public property? And he could find no certain answer to the question. Without doubt the repentance of the man had been real and sincere. His heart was in his work, and he was endeavouring to atone for his past sins. Mr. Lampirthy could well understand why he had concealed his identity. He was afraid to face the sneers of those who did not believe in the reality of his repentance, and the misplaced enthusiasm of those who look upon a converted thief or criminal as the highest type of holiness. He had acted wisely, and, as far as could be seen, from excellent motives. But how would he face an exposure? What would be the attitude of his followers? How, above all, would the general public regard the matter? The Press was muzzled, and would doubtless turn the incident to advantage. It would be of the nature of a sensation. But the public—those who had begun to feel the influence of this man's ideas, but who had not yet decided to follow his precepts—how would they view the disclosure? Mr. Lampirthy already saw the stinging comments of those papers which were beyond his control. And yet the exposure might be worked to advantage. It would be a sensation of the first magnitude. A man returning from the dead! A sinner changed to an earnest reformer! The story of the conversion, of the long days in the wilderness! The news might thrill the whole of England; it might fill the hearts of the disciples with raging enthusiasm; it might bring thousands to the feet of the man who had conquered himself and resigned his birthright to preach the Word of God.

Yet there were two sides to the question, and Mr. Lampirthy was not at all certain how to act. After an hour's careful consideration of the matter he decided to wait till he could have an interview with Father Francis himself. In the meantime the patient was not likely to

see any one who would recognize him. The two doctors, the two nurses—there was no danger from that quarter.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Lampirthy, who had a small basket on her arm.

“That poor fellow at the ‘White Lion,’” she said by way of explanation. “I thought a few grapes—I should like to take them to him, if I may.”

“Certainly, Violet, certainly,” said Mr. Lampirthy, with a smile of pleasure. “I don’t know whether he’ll be allowed to eat them. But take them by all means.”

She left the room and closed the door behind her. Mr. Lampirthy was pleased at the request. His wife had shown so much dislike of the preacher that he was glad to see the offer of this little act of kindness. He even hoped that she would see him on his bed of sickness. The sight might move her heart to pity. There was no danger to be feared from Mrs. Lampirthy, for she had only been in England three years.

XVII

AN EARTHLY PARADISE

It was not until the first snows lay white on the summit of Aran Cawddy that Father Francis was well enough to resume his work, and even then the doctors forbade the physical strain of preaching.

In the early days of his convalescence he had a quiet but memorable interview with Mr. Lampirthy, and learnt that his identity was known to at least two people in England. The millionaire, who showed more kindness and sympathy than might have been expected from his hard nature, assured the preacher that the discovery was not likely to be made public property. He also stated that his own attitude in the matter was unchanged, and that he realized the high motives which had prompted Sir Richard's desire for concealment.

All this was very pleasant to the sick man, and he unburdened his mind to Mr. Lampirthy. He told the story of his life, and spared no detail that would emphasize the vileness of his youth. Then he spoke of the days in the desert, of his repentance, of the birth of the ideas which formed the nucleus of his creed, of his resolution to make amends for the past.

His words, although they lacked the vigour and lucidity of a healthy man, were earnest and convincing. Mr. Lampirthy left the room with a very high opinion of the sinner, who had struggled out of darkness into light, and who had refused to make capital out of a conversion that might have gained him many thousands of converts. Here was a preacher who was too proud, too confident of the justice of his Cause, to employ theatrical effect. As Sir

Richard Gaunt, the converted rake, he would have appealed to the vast horde of those who find in such sudden and violent changes the direct and miraculous influence of God. The mere story of the wreck of the *Santigan*, and of the life in the desert, would have made a deep impression on the hearts of the lower classes. But Father Francis had scorned to parade his sins and his virtues as an example to the world. He had relied on the truth of his Cause. He did not claim to be anything more than an instrument in the hands of God. He had been content to speak of greater things than his own life. He had even sacrificed his heritage in order to efface his private affairs from the great work that called for something more than self-advertisement.

Mr. Lampirthy returned from the interview with the knowledge that the man, who had cost him so many millions of pounds, was at least worthy of the expenditure, and that all this wealth had not been lavished on a mere charlatan. But, in spite of this, the millionaire was filled with grave doubts about the success of the crusade. He was a man of business, and accustomed to look at things from a business point of view. The work, which he had supported with such extraordinary generosity, required a worker of great physical strength and keen intellect. And it was clear that the severe illness from which Father Francis had only emerged with his life, had weakened not only his body, but his brain.

This much was evident to the ordinary observer, but an interview with Sir David Llewellyn revealed a much more serious state of affairs.

"Your brain requires rest," the great doctor said to his patient. "If you put any undue strain upon it you may have to end your days in a lunatic asylum."

Father Francis received the verdict without flinching. He knew that both his body and brain were required for the service of his Master, and that there could be no

turning back, no placing of self before the call of duty. The soldier does not flee from death; he must fight and take his chance of the consequences. And, if the end were to be that mental death which is the most terrible of all to contemplate, well, that was the will of God.

In spite of all Mr. Lampirthy's advice, and all the terrible warnings of Sir David Llewellyn, the invalid set to work as soon as he was strong enough to interview his followers and set pen to paper. His illness, coming as it did in the height of his power and popularity, was an event of public importance. Some of the newspapers had issued daily bulletins about his health; and his work, carried on in his absence by the band of preachers whom he had inspired with his own religious fervour, had received its usual tribute of praise. All through England men and women had prayed that Father Francis might be spared to them for many years of earnest labour.

A month passed by. The land was now in the grip of winter, and the snow had crept down from the summit of the hills to the valleys beneath. All the scenery was cold and ugly—a white expanse scarred with black precipices, and bounded by an iron-grey sea.

Father Francis, whose recovery to health and strength depended on fresh air and exercise, was still confined to the house. The sky overhead was dull and laden with snow, and a bitter nor'wester swept the coast like a scythe, cutting down the sick and feeble in its path. Under the sting of the blast the preachers were driven into barns and public halls, and it required all the glowing fervour of their enthusiasm to warm their audiences into life.

One evening, towards the end of November, the great preacher sat before a roaring fire in his room at the "White Lion." His shoulders were covered with a rug, and he crouched close to the blazing coal. A table by his side was littered with papers and letters. Most of his work had been taken off his hands by his three principal

disciples, but there was much which required his personal attention.

His hands, however, were folded quietly together, and he was dreaming of the future. He was strangely disturbed by the violence of the weather, which was retarding his recovery to health. His mind was full of burning thoughts, which could find no outlet in words. He had much to say to the world, but he could not say it till he was strong enough to preach.

And, as he sat there and watched the flames dance up the chimney, he was seized with a sudden dread of the future. Was it possible that he would never again be strong enough to endure the hardships which he had made light of before his illness? He knew well enough that his strength had been crippled by the excesses of his youth. He could not forget the words of Sir David Llewellyn.

Daily and hourly he had prayed that he might be permitted to accomplish his task. He only asked for a few years of health and vigour. He only asked for a little strength, just enough to turn the thoughts of men from their pursuit of wealth to the contemplation of the hereafter.

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door, and the only maidservant of the inn entered the room. She was small, red-faced, and ugly, and was always speechless with fear when any errand took her into the presence of the preacher. She held out a card between two dirty, thick, and trembling fingers.

Father Francis looked at the card, and a faint flush came into his white face.

"Bring me that glass," he said harshly, after a momentary pause, and he pointed to a small looking-glass which was hanging on the wall. The girl brought it to him, and wondered what new and strange madness had come into his brain.

He took it from her hands and looked at his reflection long and earnestly. He noted how the hideous and stubbly growth of bristle had blurred his features. Some men would have laughed heartily at their appearance in similar circumstances. But Father Francis did not smile.

"Put back the glass," he said quietly, "and tell the lady that I will see her."

The little maidservant left the room, and a few moments afterwards returned, holding open the door for Lady Betty Drake.

Father Francis rose to his feet and bowed awkwardly. She held out her hand, and he took it in his thin fingers. Civility required this at least of him.

"I am glad to see that you are better," she said gently. "Though we have only met once, I have followed your career from the day I met you. I was sincerely grieved to hear of your illness."

"It is good of you," he muttered; "please sit down. What a terrible night for you to come into this wind-swept wilderness."

"I was in the neighbourhood," she replied, "and I particularly wished to see you."

She sat down on a hard deal chair, and loosened the heavy fur stole which hung from her shoulders. Father Francis, who had slightly shifted his position when the servant left the room, was in the shadow, and the light of the lamp was on his visitor's face. He clasped his hands and stared at the fire, waiting for her to explain her visit.

"Young Harry Brandon," she said, after a pause. "It was of him I wished to speak to you."

"Oh, yes, that poor girl—your secretary—I understand. I would have sent her a message but for my illness. It was so soon afterwards."

"Yes, yes, I know," she said hastily. "The girl came to the funeral. She told me that she prayed for your death."

The man's face grew hard and grim. He wondered if the prayer of a heart-broken girl would be answered.

"But she has repented of her wicked prayer," continued Lady Betty. "She has asked me to tell you this. She thinks that you did what you believed to be right."

"Henry Brandon died in a great cause. He was the first martyr. God will reward him and those who loved him."

"So I tried to explain," the woman said nervously. "It was hard—at first; but now she understands."

"It is well," he replied; and then there was a long silence.

"Is she still with you?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes, she is still with me."

"I am glad of that. One can forget one's sorrows in work. And you? How has your work progressed? Are you happy? Are you content?"

"I am not content. There is so much to do, more than I can deal with. But the work is prospering."

Again there was silence. Father Francis was wondering why this woman had come to see him. He did not believe that the death of Harry Brandon was a sufficient motive for her visit.

Then the door opened, and the ugly little servant appeared.

"If yer please, mum," she said hurriedly, "the missus wants to know if yer'd like a fire in yer room."

Lady Betty Drake flushed crimson as she encountered the inquiring gaze of Father Francis.

"Yes, please," she answered, and the girl left the room.

"You are staying here to-night?" asked the preacher, after a pause.

"Ye—es," she replied, "the roads are too bad to get back to Aberllyn to-night."

"You are not staying at Aberllyn," he replied sternly.

"You have come up from London to see me. Only a mat-

ter of importance could have brought you so far in this weather."

"Yes," she said, with a nervous laugh. "I have come up to see you on a matter of importance."

"It is good of you," he muttered; but he did not look at her, and shaded the firelight from his eyes with one hand.

"A fortnight ago," she continued, "I met Sir David Llewellyn at a dinner party. We had a long talk about you. He told me all about your illness, and he told me that you would have to be very careful in the future."

"An unusual subject of conversation at a dinner," the man answered drily; "and, if I may say so, Sir David was guilty of a breach of professional confidence."

"I dragged it out of him," she said quickly. "You see, I have always taken an interest in you and your work. I have not forgotten our interview. I have prayed for you every night."

"You are a good woman," he replied, after a pause, "and I am sure that your prayers have been heard."

"And now I have come to ask something of you," she continued, "and wish you to regard me, not as an impertinent stranger, but as one who takes a heartfelt interest in you."

"I shall always regard you in that light," he murmured.

"Sir David told me," she said in a low voice, "that you are not strong enough to stand the excitement and toil of your present work, and that you will break down, that perhaps even your mind will give way. Pardon me speaking so plainly, but I am very much in earnest."

"He told me the same," the man answered grimly. "He knows what he is talking about."

"I have come here to-night," she continued, "to ask you to rest for a little while—to take a year's holiday. At the end of that time you will be able to deal with your

work as you cannot deal with it now. It will be all for the good of your Cause. If you continue your work now, you will break down altogether, and then, who will take your place? Not only for your own sake, but for the work which is so dear to you, I implore you to rest for a while—for a year."

For a few moments Father Francis was silent. Then he rose unsteadily to his feet and gripped the mantelpiece with one hand.

"For a year?" he cried fiercely. "You ask me to wait for a year? I must work, work, work, and not lose a minute of my time. For the night is coming, when no man can work."

Lady Betty looked at his haggard face and sunken eyes, and her heart was filled with pity and terror. She saw the birth of madness on the face of the man she loved, and she cast aside all prudence and self-restraint.

She rose to her feet with a cry of anguish, and, gripping his arm with both her hands, looked up into his face.

"Dick!" she cried, and then paused, knowing that the one word would tell him everything.

For a moment the man stood irresolute, fear, anger, and even love battling in his heart for the mastery. Then he suddenly shook himself free from her grasp and stepped back a pace or two, still holding on to the mantelpiece with one hand. A dozen sentences rose to his lips, but he was not able to give utterance to any one of them.

"You know me?" he said harshly; and that was all that he could say at a time which might be the crisis of his life.

"Yes, I know you, Dick," she answered. "I knew you when we first met at the House of Rest. Do you wonder that I have prayed for you each night of my life?"

"You must be silent," he gasped, "you must not speak. You will not—you have kept silence for so long."

"If it is only that which troubles you," she replied

quietly, "you can set your mind at rest. I shall not speak."

"No, Betty, no. Of course you will not. I feel a brute for suggesting such a thing. It would ruin my work."

"I have come down here to save you, Dick," she continued. "Only the hope of saving you would have induced me to let you know that I recognized you. I have come to you now to plead with you as a woman, who can only use one argument, that she desires to save you from madness and death."

"I will not listen to you, Betty," he cried savagely. "You have no right to be here, no right to speak to me as if you knew me. Sir Richard Gaunt is dead."

"So you told me, and I understand. I have not forgotten, but I know my duty."

"There is my work," he exclaimed. "All else is as nothing. I will not listen to you. Do you realize how many souls I have to save? You must leave me now—at once. You must never come back—never, mind you. Nothing that you can say will alter my plans. I shall work till the last moment. God will give me strength; and if He does not, I shall break myself in His service. You must leave me now. I have told you before, and I tell you again, that Sir Richard Gaunt is dead."

She turned away from him, white-faced and trembling, and, seating herself by the table, buried her face in her hands. He looked at her with fear in his eyes. She had brought to him a vision of quiet happiness, of a life passed in the love which God had sanctified, of the smaller but less exacting duties which are required of good and religious men in the ordinary walks of life. For one brief moment he saw her as his wife; he heard the voice of his children; there was a glimpse of a paradise which he could never enter.

Then the stern axe of his fanaticism crashed down on the picture and broke it to pieces.

"Leave me!" he cried fiercely. "Have you come here to tempt me? Do you think that because I have been ill I am too weak to resist temptation? I tell you I am not. I shall do my work till I break—yes, break. It will not be for long."

The loud excited tones of his voice spoke of the unbalanced mind. Lady Betty recovered her self-possession. Her moment of weakness was past. She realized that she would need all her strength to do battle for the life of the man she loved. She raised her head and smiled.

"There is no need to shout at me, Dick," she said quietly. "Sit down and talk to me. There is a lot that I wish to know. I suppose you don't object to my presence."

"No," he replied feebly. The tone of her voice made it impossible for him to reply in the heroic strain of his last speech.

"I cannot tell you how glad I was to know that you were alive and well," she said calmly. "Yet, when I recognized you, I thought it better to say nothing. I could see that you did not wish to be recognized."

He seated himself in his big easy-chair, and then rose again to his feet.

"I beg your pardon," he said hastily. "It is rude of me to take the only comfortable chair in the room. Please sit down in it. You must excuse my manners. I am not used to the society of ladies."

"No, thank you," she replied lightly. "It is too near the fire, and besides, if I once got down into it, I'm afraid I should never get out again." She smiled as she spoke, and there was more in that smile than the man could see. She had carried the first outwork of the fortress. She had brought his mind down to the ordinary civilities of everyday life.

He reseated himself, and looked at her with grave, earnest eyes.

"You are tiring yourself out with your work," he said after a pause; "you need a rest."

"People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," she replied. He shuddered, as though she had touched a raw nerve. She saw that she had made a mistake, and hastened to remove a bad impression of levity.

"Tell me about yourself," she said gently. "How you escaped from the wreck; I have wondered so often."

"I will tell you," he replied simply, and he narrated the story in the baldest possible language. He told of his life among the Arabs, and of his subsequent return to England. But he said nothing of the great change which had come into his life, or of the voice that he had heard in the wilderness. Nor, on the other hand, did he mention the episode of the woman who had been with him on the raft.

"It is wonderful," she said, when he had finished his narrative. "It certainly seems as though you had been saved for some great work in life."

"I know it!" he exclaimed, raising his voice. "And all I ask is that I may be given the strength to finish my task."

The conversation was once more on the verge of high and dangerous ground, and Lady Betty hastened to bring it down to a safer level. She commenced to talk of the past, of the friends they had once known in Wales, of little episodes of their childhood, of the ring he had given her as a boy. Then she mentioned his brother, and mimicked the ridiculous and pompous manner of Sir Henry Gaunt. And he listened to her with pleasure, little knowing the snare that she was setting about his soul.

When at last she had created the "atmosphere" she desired, and saturated his mind with all the more pleasant memories of the past, she began to speak of her own work.

She told him what a comfort it had been to her. She explained the details of her scheme. She talked of the poor women she had saved from degradation. But she spoke of everything in a quiet, practical manner, which formed a marked contrast to the wild words that had fallen from his own lips. She had a definite object in view. She wished to take him outside the region of fanaticism.

And all through her conversation she touched lightly but firmly on the personal note. Whether as a child playing on the seashore, or as a woman turning from all the joys of life to hard and unselfish toil, she never let him lose sight of her own personality in the picture. And, as he listened to her, he forgot everything save that he had once loved her, and had left her to a life of loneliness. She rose up before him as something great and real in his life, something that he could not break away from, even something holy that he could not cast aside with the sins and follies of his youth.

Then at last she was silent, and there was no sound but the soft crackle of the fire, and the roar of the wind outside the inn. His eyes were fixed upon her face, but she did not look at him. She waited for him to speak, trembling in every nerve and muscle of her body.

At last he spoke.

"Betty," he said quietly, "I have done you a great wrong. God knows I cannot repair it. He has taken me out of that world in which you and I might have found happiness. He has placed my work before me. I cannot look back."

Her arms were on the table, and she bowed her head between them and sobbed quietly.

"There is no cause for tears," he said quietly, "no cause for sorrow. It is I who should weep for this evil I have done."

But still the woman sobbed, and did not lift her head. He watched her with his burning eyes. Then he rose to

his feet, and, coming close to her side, laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"You have your work, Betty," he said tenderly, "and I have mine. We will each try and do it faithfully to the end."

She did not move nor look at him nor try to speak.

"You are a good and a sweet woman," he continued. "For any man who desired an earthly paradise, there could be nothing fairer than the companionship of such a woman. Often in my hours of disappointment and pain and sorrow and unrest have I longed with all my soul for the peace and quietude of a home made pure and holy by love. But I have dashed the vision from my eyes. There is no such reward for the man who has sinned, and who can only atone by giving himself to God."

For a moment there was silence. Then the woman raised her head and stretched out her arms to him.

"Dick," she cried passionately, "I will give you happiness, if you will take it."

He shrank back and looked into her pleading face. He understood, and the passion leapt into his eyes in answer to her words.

Then he suddenly caught one of her hands in his and bent his head swiftly down, as though to kiss her on the lips. Then all movement seemed to cease in his body, and he leant over her like a statue carved out of stone.

Then he suddenly gave a cry of terror, and flung her hand from him with such violence that it struck the table, and the next moment he was five feet away from her, and his eyes blazed with fury.

"I will not take it!" he thundered. "What devil has entered into you that you should tempt me with your lures of happiness? But I am not so weak that I cannot fight. Leave me and pray to God for forgiveness. Remember that you have dared to lift up your hand against Him, that you have tried to destroy His holy work, that you have

imperilled the salvation of His servant. Leave me and pray for pardon. I, too, will pray for you, and for my own sins that moved me to take your hand."

He paused, white, and trembling with passion. There was the ring of madness in his wild words, and his eyes glowed with unnatural fire. Some power had seized him and shaken him with all the violence of a spiritual tempest.

Lady Betty rose to her feet and left the room without another word. Directly she had gone he flung the door to with a crash and locked it, and leant against it as though some enemy were without.

Then he sank on his knees by a chair and prayed. An hour passed, and the fire died down to a heap of grey ashes. But still he muttered incoherent prayers and conjured up dreams of Eternal Light.

And the radiance of his thoughts dimmed the fading vision of an earthly paradise.

XVIII

THE PARTING

FATHER FRANCIS left his room a week after the interview with Lady Betty Drake. The sky was dull and laden with snow, and a bitter wind swept the coast like a scythe, cutting down the weak and feeble in its path. But the man did not flinch from his task.

He was tired of inaction. During the dreary months of illness his mind had worked unceasingly; he was longing to fling himself once more into the thick of the conflict. Everything had seemed so clear to him as he lay on his bed of sickness. And all the time he was consumed with a desire to speak out his thoughts to the world. He felt as though God had given him a fresh inspiration, as though his illness had been sent to purify his heart and strengthen the visions of his brain.

And so once again, regardless of Mr. Lampirthy's opposition, and the doctor's warnings, he went forth to preach his gospel to the world. His disciples greeted him with wild enthusiasm, and the Welsh people flocked in thousands to hear him. His illness had been so much discussed by the newspapers that it had assumed the proportions of a national calamity. His reappearance in public was hailed as an event of supreme importance. The crowds that gathered together were so immense that his voice was scarcely strong enough to reach to the edge of them. Every day he made hundreds of converts to his Cause.

It was a long and bitter winter, but even the severity of the weather seemed to have no effect on the ardour of Father Francis and his disciples, nor on the hot enthusiasm of the men and women who came to hear them. The people stood ankle-deep in snow, or bared their heads in the blinding sleet, or knelt on the ground till their clothes

froze to the ice-covered rock. The words of the preacher carried them beyond all thought of discomfort. They were uplifted, in ecstasy. They responded to every tone of his voice; they wept or laughed with joy, as he willed them to weep or laugh.

But Mr. Lampirthy, after a consultation with Sir David Llewellyn, learnt that it was his duty to check the fury of the crusade, if he wished Father Francis to live. He travelled down into Wales with the express purpose of persuading the preacher to relinquish his task for a few months.

He found Father Francis in a small ruined cottage on the slope of the mountains south of Aberllyn. The snow was sixteen inches deep in this place, which was nearly a thousand feet above the level of the sea. Round the cottage were a dozen tents, in which the sturdy followers of the Cause endured every hardship that cold and self-denial could bring them. Father Francis himself only sought the superior warmth and shelter of stone walls because he had been in the doctor's hands, and wished to keep all his bodily strength for his Crusade.

Mr. Lampirthy shuddered as he entered the room, which was on the ground floor. The ceiling was dark with moisture, for part of the roof had fallen in, and the room above was open to the sky. There was not a stick of furniture in the place, and the only signs of occupancy were a few rugs and an empty box turned upside down. Some damp sticks spluttered in the grate and poured out a thick volume of smoke. Father Francis stood at one of the windows and looked out at the clear frosty sky. There was no glass to dim the scene that lay before his eyes.

"What a devil of a hole to live in!" said Mr. Lampirthy roughly. "Look here, Gaunt, you'll kill yourself if you sleep in these sort of places."

"I am ashamed of it," the preacher replied, without turning his head. "My followers are content with a bare rag of canvas to shelter them. But for my illness, I would not dare to sleep in so much luxury."

"Luxury!" exclaimed Mr. Lampirthy, walking up to Father Francis and gripping him fiercely by the arm. "Look here, Gaunt, I've come down here to put an end to this nonsense. You must have a rest. You must go to the south of France till the summer."

"Go to the south of France, Mr. Lampirthy? You must be dreaming."

"No, it is you who are dreaming. You must be sensible. Llewellyn says you'll kill yourself if you're not careful——"

"Bah, doctors are fools! My body is as strong as that of a horse. I feel no fatigue, no cold. I am as well as I ever was in my life."

Mr. Lampirthy looked at the thin, muscular frame, at the deep-set, burning eyes, at the unhealthy flush on the sunken cheeks.

"You can't stand it," he said quietly. "You've knocked about a bit in the past, you know."

"I know my own strength. It is no business of yours, Mr. Lampirthy."

"Pardon me," the millionaire replied, "it is my business. I am running this show, paying the bills. I want to see you win. If you were a racehorse, I should consider it my business to see that you were well and strong, fit to win the race."

Father Francis turned away from the window and paced up and down the tiny room. Then he paused, and fixed his burning eyes on Mr. Lampirthy's face.

"I am very grateful to you," he said sternly; "very grateful for all you have done. God will reward you. Yet I should like you to understand that the battle is over, the Cause has triumphed. We no longer need the assistance of your wealth. The nation has responded to the call of God. I hold the people in my hands."

He stretched out his lean fingers and grasped at the air. Mr. Lampirthy smiled.

"These emotional people are slippery," he replied;

"they go as easily as they come. But I am here to insist on your having a long rest. Your disciples can carry on the work. You must go to the south of France; you must be idle; you must not even think or write a letter. You will return to your work with redoubled energy. I insist on this."

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall withdraw my support."

Father Francis studied the millionaire's face.

"You are not well," he said after a long silence. "It was foolish of you to come to this place in such weather."

"I am not well. But that hardly concerns the matter I came to speak about."

"If anything were to happen to you," the preacher continued, "I should have to do without your support. Life is uncertain."

"Very true. But I intend to provide for the Cause in my will—if you are content to obey me."

"I cannot obey you," cried Father Francis. "I must obey God, and he calls on me to speak all that is in my heart."

"Very well. Then you will be able to see if you can do without me. It will be an interesting experiment. But remember, that if I once withdraw my support, I shall not give it back again."

"I am a servant of God. I do not need the help of the world or of riches."

"You needed it once," Mr. Lampirthy said drily; "but you had better think over the matter. I will give you a fortnight. Perhaps, when you consider the question in the quietude of this place, you will change your views. I will return to Aberllyn; my motor is waiting there for me."

"I will go with you. These mountains are dangerous in the dark in this weather."

"Thank you, but I won't trouble you. I've got a guide. He's a shepherd who knows the hills, and he's carrying a lantern. Good-night."

“Good-night,” said Father Francis gently, “and whatever happens in the future, God bless you for all you have done in the past.”

Ten days elapsed, and no word passed between Mr. Lampirthy and the preacher. The latter, drunk with the success of his preaching, and finding that he had become the most commanding figure in the religious world, had already decided to continue his work and do without Mr. Lampirthy’s support. He had—though as yet he was ignorant of the fact—lost all control over himself. His brain was unable to rest. Banishment to the south of France would have driven him mad. He was bound to go on preaching, bound to continue his work of gathering in souls. He had once told Mr. Lampirthy that the curse of rich men was their inability to cease from the accumulation of wealth. His own disease, though less sordid in its symptoms, was not very dissimilar to this. He could not cease from his work; he was bound to continue it, knowing no rest till the day of his death.

Then one evening, as the preacher held a vast audience spellbound with his eloquence, a man pushed his way through the crowd and held out a telegram in his hand.

Father Francis took no notice of him, but continued his discourse. The moon flung its trail of white fire over the crags and passes of the hills. The people wept and trembled as the preacher’s words swept across them like a storm across a field of corn. The man waited patiently close against the slab of rock which served as a platform.

At last the preacher finished, and after a long and earnest prayer dismissed the people. As they began to move away in silence, the bearer of the telegram once more thrust out his hand.

Father Francis, whose mind had not yet returned to earthly things, took the message without any show of interest, and opened the envelope slowly and mechanically in the light of a lantern which hung on a pole by his side.

Then he read the contents :

"Mr. Lampirthy died at noon. I wish to see you. 193 Wharf Road, Rotherhithe.—Violet Lampirthy."

For a while he stood motionless, and the piece of paper in his hand fluttered in the faint breeze. His disciples watched him, and shivered in their rags. They were tired, cold, and hungry; they waited his signal to depart to the camp, which was half a mile away.

Then he suddenly sank on his knees, and clasped his hands in prayer.

"Brethren," he said in a clear voice, "it has pleased God to take our dear brother, Harry Lampirthy, from the sins and sorrows of this world. Pray with me in silence for a little while."

All the disciples fell on their knees, and for the space of five minutes there was a great silence.

Then Father Francis rose to his feet, and the others one by one; not together, as at a signal, but when each had finished his prayer.

Then one of them began to sing the opening lines of the hymn :

A few more years shall roll,
A few more seasons come.

The others joined in, and far down the slope the departing crowds paused and listened, and some of them joined in, for the Welsh people are a musical race, and cannot resist the strains of a hymn. And, as they looked back, they saw the little band of disciples—a dark patch against the moonlit snow.

When the hymn was over, Father Francis dismissed his disciples, and remained alone on the mountain.

Once more he fell upon his knees, and this time he prayed for himself and his Cause.

XIX

THE SEAT OF JUSTICE

FATHER FRANCIS took the first train in the morning to London, and made his way to 193 Wharf Road, Rotherhithe. It was a six-roomed house in a mean and dirty street.

The door was opened by Gus Dixon, and he ushered the preacher into a small and shabbily furnished room and closed the door.

"Very sudden," he said in a soft voice, such as a man uses in the presence of the dead. "He has only been ill three days. Much the same as your own case, but he hadn't your strength. This money-making is a terrible strain on the constitution."

"Ill for three days" queried Father Francis sharply. "Why was I not told? Why was I not sent for?"

"Mrs. Lampirthy did not wish it, and the doctor thought it would be unwise; besides, it would have been of no use. He was unconscious most of the time."

"He is here, in this house?"

"Yes."

"I should like to see him."

"Very well. I will ask Mrs. Lampirthy."

He left the room, and Father Francis knew at once that he was an unwelcome visitor. The secretary's tone was barely civil, and his manner was distinctly hostile. In a minute or two he returned.

"Yes, you can see him," he said in a whisper. "I will take you to the room. Afterwards Mrs. Lampirthy would like to see you."

He showed Father Francis to a small bedroom upstairs.

The richest man in the world lay upon a cheap iron bedstead. The preacher advanced to the side of the bed, and then turned to Gus Dixon.

"Leave me," he said sternly. "I should like to be alone with him."

The secretary left the room and closed the door. Father Francis turned back the sheet and looked at the dead man's face. It seemed small and childlike. It was no longer the face of the fighter, of the strong man who had ruined thousands in the battle for wealth.

He gazed at it for a while, and then looked round at the room in which the man had died.

"He lived like a poor man," he said to himself; "he died in this cottage—an example to all the world of how a rich man may live and die. He will have his reward."

And, as he fell upon his knees and prayed, his heart was filled with a great joy, and he gave thanks to God.

Ten minutes later he left the room. Gus Dixon met him at the foot of the stairs.

"Mrs. Lampirthy will see you," he said curtly, and he opened the door of a small back room.

Father Francis entered. The widow was seated at a bare deal table, which was covered with black-edged paper and envelopes. She did not rise, as he closed the door behind him, and a glance at her hard white face told him that any expression of sympathy on his part would be out of place.

"You wished to speak to me?" he asked gently.

"Yes," she replied. "Will you please sit down."

"I will not sit down, Mrs. Lampirthy," he said after a pause, "but I will listen to what you have to say."

"I want to tell you something," she said quietly. "It is something of great importance to you and your work. I think it advisable that you should know at once."

"I will listen," he replied.

"A few weeks ago my poor dear husband made a will

in which he left more than half his fortune to the Cause in which he took such an interest. This money was to be invested in the names of two trustees, of which you were one. The amount included all the shares in the Paper Combine and several millions in gilt-edged securities."

She paused, waiting for a look of pleasure to come into the man's face, but she was disappointed. Father Francis eyed her with a cold look of disapproval.

"That will," she continued softly, "was never completed or signed. It required a good deal of alteration. The previous one left everything to Sibyl and myself."

Again she paused, waiting for the desired effect, but again she was disappointed. The man's face was like a mask of stone.

Father Francis made no reply to her statement. Perhaps it required no comment.

"These are the facts of the whole business," said Mrs. Lampirthy, after a pause, "and I wish you to understand them. I have taken Mr. Lampirthy's place, and for the future you will have to look to me for funds."

Father Francis moved a step forward, and laid one hand on the table.

"Why don't you come to the point?" he said in a low voice. "Why don't you say straight out that you have no intention of supplying me with any funds at all?"

"I am so glad you understand," she replied, with a smile. "You have spared me the pain of telling you."

Father Francis folded his arms and bowed his head. His lips moved as if in prayer. Then he suddenly raised his eyes, and the woman shrank from his gaze.

"Mrs. Lampirthy," he said slowly, "may God forgive me for the thoughts that were in my mind, for the words that were on my lips. And may God forgive you, and soften your heart, so that you will not be afraid in the hour of death."

"You have not asked me why I am doing this," she continued, "why I am forced to do this horrible thing."

"Because you want your money for other purposes. Perhaps because you owe me a grudge for what I once said to you. It does not matter."

"Yes, it does matter," she exclaimed fiercely; and then, as though ashamed of raising her voice, she dropped it to a whisper. "I want you to know that I am acting justly, and that my actions will need no forgiveness."

"Perhaps you have your own ideas of justice."

"Has it never occurred to you," said Mrs. Lampirthy slowly, "that the inexorable laws of the universe are just, and that as a man has sown, so shall he reap. Have you never been afraid that one day a dead and perhaps forgotten sin may rise up against the man who committed it, and, in spite of all repentance and prayer, may destroy the work which he looks upon as an atonement? Has this never occurred to you, Father Francis?"

"There is forgiveness for sins," he replied in a low voice.

"Yes, perhaps—in the hereafter. But we are taught that the laws of nature are inexorable, that a man's sin will find him out, that the wages of sin is death. I do not know my Bible very well, Henry Rankin, but many texts occur to me."

He was silent, and scrutinized her face with his fierce dark eyes. He understood.

"So that is why you have been set against me and my work," he said, after a pause. "Have you known all along?"

"I did not know until your illness," she replied. "I asked to see you while you were unconscious. But for your threats to me I should not have asked to see you. You aroused my curiosity. You have only yourself to thank. Of course, I recognized you at once when you were clean-shaven. One does not so easily forget. Only

one thing has forced me to disregard my husband's wishes, and that is the knowledge that I am punishing Sir Richard Gaunt for his past sins."

"May God forgive you," he said hoarsely.

"I shall not need forgiveness. I am His instrument of justice. To gratify your own passions you ruined a young and innocent girl. It is fitting that she should rise up again from the past and destroy your work. I shall have no pity. And I shall not rest until I have ruined you."

"What do you intend to do?"

"My first act," she said calmly, "will be to give all the newspapers their freedom. You can then see how long they will let you have their support. I shall also refuse to pay you and your preachers. You will all have to work or starve. But I shall do more than this. I shall be actively hostile to your Cause. I shall expose you, rake up the details of your past, have them published in the papers. Doubtless, many of your other victims will come forward and join their voices to mine. I shall not rest till I have ruined you."

"Have you no shame," he exclaimed, "no respect for the dead, that you dare to harbour such thoughts at such a time as this?"

"I do not speak for myself," she replied gravely. "I am the instrument of justice. I shall carry out the inexorable law—the law that you have broken."

Father Francis looked at her steadily, and, though her claims were ridiculous, he did not smile. The thought struck him that this fragile, fair-haired little woman was a small enough item in the great scheme of Eternal Justice; but he knew that she had it in her power to do him much harm, if the weight of her great wealth were used against him as an active and hostile force.

"I shall endeavour to make you understand your position," she continued. "You will be forced to realize

that your work only exists by the support of the money which you affect to despise. Perhaps you think that your prayers, your personality, your life of self-denial, have raised you to the position in which you stand. But you will soon know that only one thing has lifted you out of obscurity—my husband's wealth. That is not a pleasant thought for one who is preaching the gospel of poverty. But it is the truth. And now that you are deprived of his wealth, you will learn how weak you are."

"I know my weakness," he replied humbly. "But God will fight for me and I will finish the work I have begun. I will not even answer your taunts. You cannot sting me with your words. I shall not lift my hand against you—for the sake of the child. The world will never know your story."

"I do not mind if it does," she replied quickly. "I can defy it. No one can take my money from me now."

"What shall it profit a man," said Father Francis, "if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" You are not lifting your hand against me, Mrs. Lampirthy, in this wicked act of vengeance; you are lifting your hand to destroy the work of God. But you will learn how feeble you are. I can stand and fight alone. I had already decided to do so. A fortnight ago Mr. Lampirthy threatened to withdraw his support. He asked me to go to the south of France till the summer for the sake of my health. I felt bound to refuse. He gave me a fortnight to decide. You have done no more than he himself would have done, though you have acted from less worthy motives. But I am strong enough to fight and stand alone."

"Very well," said Mrs. Lampirthy, "there is no need to prolong the interview. I suppose you won't believe me when I say that it is painful to me—at such a time as this. You don't believe that I am acting from a sense of duty."

Father Francis was silent. Then he walked slowly to the door and placed his fingers on the handle.

"I am strong enough to fight," he said sternly, "with the help of God. I shall pray for you and for our child. May God deliver her from the prison of her riches."

"He has delivered her from a worse fate," Mrs. Lam-pirthy replied coldly. "I might have been your wife."

For a moment his fierce eyes blazed with resentment, with disgust and horror. Then he left the room and passed out into the street.

When he had gone a few yards, he paused and looked back. He saw the mean little house, with its drawn blinds—the home of the richest man in the world.

"Thank God for that," he said to himself, as he proceeded on his way. "Thank God at any rate for that."

XX

THE DOWNFALL

MRS. LAMPIRTHY was as good as her word, and, before three weeks had elapsed, Father Francis felt the full fury of the vengeance which she cloaked under the name of justice.

The newspapers were freed from their bondage. The Great Paper Trust cancelled its contracts and offered to supply paper at reasonable prices without any conditions. The Press began to be discreetly silent about Father Francis and all his works. The editors and proprietors had long chafed under Mr. Lampirthy's restriction, and they longed to rend the preacher with tooth and nail. But they realized that so sudden a change in their policy would create a grave suspicion in the minds of their readers, and they were content to be silent.

Mrs. Lampirthy, however, had no desire for this contemptuous silence, and after a while she sought out Gus Dixon and offered to retain him as her secretary at a salary of five thousand pounds a year. This able young man earned his money. In less than a fortnight the unfortunate newspapers were once more in the hands of a tyrant, and the various proprietors received a very broad hint as to the future policy of their editors.

Unpleasant little paragraphs about Father Francis began to appear in the same papers which had once lauded him to the skies.

And, by degrees, these paragraphs developed into a hostile crusade. And then one morning it was blazoned forth to the world that the saintly Father Francis was none other than the notorious rake, Sir Richard Gaunt.

The news created a sensation. The preacher openly confessed to his past life, and the confession attracted a large number of converts, who were glad to think that this holy man had once been a sinner, even as they were. But Father Francis himself had no wish to pose in this light, and the publication of the truth gave rise to many painful incidents. The past began to rise up in hideous mockery of his present life.

The first person to call upon him was his brother, who came post haste from Gaunt Royal on receipt of the news. The interview between the two men was not marked by any display of affection. Henry Gaunt opened the conversation by demanding proof of Sir Richard's identity. This was at once forthcoming, and then Henry, to do him justice, tried to show some genuine pleasure at his brother's return to the land of the living. But it was clear that his mind was occupied with his own position, and that he considered himself a cruelly injured man. He soon came to the point. He made a cash offer of forty thousand pounds for the Gaunt Royal estate, and the offer was accepted. Sir Richard Gaunt repaid thirty thousand pounds of this money to the society that had inherited the estate of the late George Crawshay, and the remainder he placed on deposit at a bank, to be used for the common good of the Cause.

The receipt of this money was the only satisfactory result that followed on the disclosure of the preacher's real name. Old friends of a most undesirable character began to come forward and claim acquaintance; men and women, whom six years of evil living had dragged down still deeper into sin, wrote to him and even called upon him.

Then he began to be haunted by an overwhelming fear of these people, who appeared like ghosts from the past. He refused to see them or answer their letters. But they continued to cross his path.

The man, weighed down by Mrs. Lampirthy's malicious persecution and haunted by the loathsome spectres of his old life, was only sustained by that burning enthusiasm, which exalts the mind at the expense of bodily strength and mental stability. His religious fervour acted like some drug, which stimulates for the moment, but which gradually wears out the nerves and tissues of the human frame. Never before had he risen to such heights of eloquence; never before had he displayed such power of endurance, such glowing vitality, such skill in moving his audience to fear and repentance.

For six months he fought with almost superhuman skill and energy, and at the end of that time it seemed as though he were destined to achieve a victory. His personal fervour and eloquence had risen superior to all the forces of the world that had been gathered together to destroy him. He had lost the support of the more intellectual portion of his followers, but the lower classes flocked in their thousands to hear him.

Many of his disciples had been forced to leave him and return to their former ways of earning a livelihood. He no longer had the money to provide so many men with their daily bread. But those who remained with him redoubled their energy and worked without ceasing.

"Give me strength, O God; give me strength to conquer."

That was his daily, almost his hourly prayer. All he needed was strength, both bodily and mental, to carry on the warfare. He had survived the onslaught of the Press, and the bitter hostility of the woman who had so much wealth that her enmity was a thing of real force. He was still a great name in the land, and he still had power to move the multitudes with his words. On every side of him he saw the practical results of his preaching. Men and women were leading simpler lives, and were realizing

that the mind and the soul can find happiness apart from anything that money can purchase.

Yet he realized that everything depended on his own bodily strength, on the clearness of his thoughts, on the eloquence of his tongue. There were many earnest workers for the Cause, but so far he had found no disciple of sufficient intellect to take his place. He was the moving spirit in the whole crusade, the central force which moved all the machinery. He knew that, if he ceased from his labours, everything would be thrown into confusion. He could not rest. During Mr. Lampirthy's lifetime he could have rested for a while and gone to the south of France; but now, when all the forces of the Press were set against him, he could not rest. He could not leave the battlefield even for a day. So much depended on his own personality. While the millionaire was alive, the work of organization was left to the man of business. But now Father Francis was alone, at a time when he needed something more than piety or eloquence in his battle with the world.

Yet the man was so stimulated by his religious fervour that for six months he contrived to carry on the fight with a fair chance of success.

But when each day's work was over, and he needed rest, his whole physical and mental strength collapsed, and more than once he felt a desire to take his own life, and put an end to the misery of the sleepless hours of darkness. Only a strong and genuine piety restrained him at these times of depression and despair. The desire to kill himself frightened him. It was yet another ghost from the past which had been so cruelly dragged to light again. He tried to attribute it to the revival of old associations, and fought against it like a brave man.

So long as this mental and bodily collapse did not interfere with his daily work, he faced it with fortitude.

He endured the terrible visions of the night and believed that they were a punishment for his past sins.

But one day, as he preached to a vast crowd which had gathered together on the Sussex downs to hear him, he suddenly stopped in the middle of a sentence and faced them with a look of terror. His mind was a blank. A second before his brain had teemed with burning words and keen arguments. But now he could think of nothing. He could not finish the sentence he had begun; he could not even frame another one to take its place. For more than a minute he was dumb. Then words and ideas returned to him. He poured them out in a jumble of wild sentences. And then he ceased and prayed, and the sweat poured off his body, for he was in an agony of fear.

This was but the first of many similar occurrences, and by degrees Father Francis realized that he was face to face with a more terrible enemy than Mrs. Lampirthy. Both body and brain were giving way under the continual strain.

He went to an eminent doctor in London, and listened to the same verdict which he had received from the lips of Sir David Llewellyn many months before.

“You must have rest—at least six months’ rest.”

But, as he left the great physician, he knew that it was impossible for him to rest. If Mr. Lampirthy had been alive, even if Mrs. Lampirthy had been willing to help him with her wealth, he might have been able to leave the fight for six months. But he could not leave it now, even for a day.

During the next month Father Francis began to lose his hold on the people. He lost it gradually but surely. At first his lapses of memory were greeted with pity and compassion, and his hearers prayed that he might be restored to health. But, as the breakdowns became more frequent and more striking, the men were moved to laughter, and the women were frightened.

"He has sinned against God," the more pious said to each other; "His work does not meet with God's approval." But the coarser natures only laughed, and brought others to see the fun. There were even those who found it amusing to watch the white face working convulsively and note the terror in the deep sunken eyes, and listen to the wild incoherent words that followed.

"Woe unto you, blasphemers! Woe unto you that mock me! You eat and drink and to-morrow you die! Weak and helpless though I am, God will——" He paused, and a look of fear came into his eyes. He passed his hand across his forehead; his lips moved idiotically. The audience roared with laughter.

He was preaching in an empty wagon placed against a high and ugly wall. The moon shone brightly in a clear sky. Immediately in front of him stood a small company of his disciples, bare-headed, clothed in their brown robes, and set in an orderly line as though about to march to battle. Beyond them was a clear space, and beyond that a great multitude, stretching out from the white individuality of faces into a black and indefinite blur.

He fell on his knees and commenced to pray earnestly, passionately, like one who realizes that he is near to death. The multitude joked, and nudged each other, and chuckled. Some one threw a lump of mud, and it hit him on the shoulder.

He ceased to pray and covered his face with his hands. The audience shouted and whistled.

Then suddenly there was a stir among the people, and a woman began to force her way to the front of the crowd. She was clothed in filthy rags. Her dark, handsome face was haggard and pinched with poverty; her eyes, set deep in their sockets, glittered in the light from the sky. Her head was uncovered, and a coil of her black hair hung down one of her white cheeks.

"Let us eat and drink," she screamed, "for to-morrow we die!" Then she broke free from the crowd and stood in the open space before the ranks of kneeling disciples.

Several of the disciples rose to their feet and moved forward to check the woman's blasphemy.

"Stay," cried Father Francis, "let her speak."

No one moved, and the woman, planting one of her feet forward, raised her head and shook it till her hair fell in a dark cloud over her shoulders. And, as her face stood out clearly in the light of the moon, Father Francis recognized it. Yet another ghost had risen from his past to accuse him. He remembered where he had last seen the dark eyes and splendid hair. The scene floated before his eyes—the table covered with bottles of wine and remnants of a feast, the wild dance, the coarse brutality of Lord Carfax, the quarrel, the blow struck in a moment of drunken fear and madness, the motionless body on the hearth-rug, and then George Crawshay, the tempter, offering silence for a price which had not yet been paid. All this he saw as clearly as though it lay before his eyes. And this poor ragged, half-starved woman was the sorceress who had conjured it up from the past. Frozen into silence, he looked at her as a man might look at the sudden evidence of some terrible disease in his body.

The multitude applauded as if they had been at a theatre, and bandied coarse jests.

"Let us dance, Richard Gaunt," shrieked the woman. "Since we cannot eat, and there is nothing to drink but water, let us dance, for to-morrow we die. You have said it, Dick, you have said it. I am glad, yes, all you poor devout fools, I am glad." She shook her clenched fist at the little band of disciples. Men shouted out vile epithets and women shrieked abuse, but the woman faced Sir Richard Gaunt, and mocked all his religion in her very pose. "Look at me," she yelled. "Six years ago I had

whatever I wanted. To-day I starve. But I can dance. Come and dance with me, Richard Gaunt."

Cynthia Paradine flung her arms above her head; they were bare to the elbow, and wasted to skin and bone. Then she swayed gracefully and slowly like a tall palm tree stirred by the wind. Then, with a sudden shriek of laughter, the movement quickened, and her whole body seemed to leap into life. She broke into a wild, terrible dance.

The crowd burst into a roar of delight and clapped their hands. Then a score of roughs made a rush for the wagon, beat down the weak and half-starved disciples, and seizing Father Francis, dragged him to the woman's side.

"Dance wiv 'er!" they yelled. "Dance, yer —, dance!"

He raved and fought and screamed out. Then he suddenly grew limp in their hands. The woman came forward and seized him by the arm.

"Dance, Dick, dance!" she yelled. Then she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. The men let go of him and he fell heavily forward to the ground.

XXI

THE FULFILMENT

FATHER FRANCIS stood alone on the summit of Aran Cawddy and looked seawards into the darkness. Overhead the stars twinkled in the blue-black sky. No sound came to that lonely height save the murmur of the wind as it swept inland through the crags and gullies of the mountain.

He had lost his hold on the people. He had been driven out of London by an infuriated mob, and his life had only been saved by the intervention of the police. In the country he had met with the same hostile reception, and his appearance had been the signal for disturbances everywhere. From place to place he and his few disciples had wandered westwards, until they reached Wales, which had once been the heart of the new religious movement. But even here he found that he had no power over the few that came to listen to him.

Father Francis was alone. It even seemed that God had forsaken him. He saw in his defeat a proof of the Divine wrath. He had only been raised up so that he might fall to the greater depths. The very past had been used against him as a weapon of destruction. But for Mrs. Lampirthy he would still have been able to fight with the world. With millions at his disposal he might still have carried on his crusade, and regained the position he had lost. But he was penniless, starving and discredited. Even his brain and physical strength were exhausted. The battle was over, and he had fallen. Nor could he ever hope to raise his head. Every day the newspapers and public opinion were beating it lower and lower into the dust. And God had forsaken him.

This was the most terrible thought of all. He sank on his knees and prayed, but found no comfort in prayer.

After a while his bodily strength failed him, and he was unable to kneel any longer. He lay down on the bare rock, and closed his eyes and crossed his hands on his breast. He was worn out with fatigue and exhausted by hunger. And then all thought and feeling grew numb, and he slept.

When he awoke, it was still dark, but a thin bar of grey lay behind the mountains to the east of Aran Cawddy, and the stars were dimmer in the vault of heaven above his head.

He raised himself to a sitting posture and tried to struggle to his feet. But he found that he was too weak. His body was racked with pain, his mouth was parched with thirst, his teeth chattered with the cold.

He lay back on the rocks and kept his eyes fixed on the sky. In spite of his bodily torment his brain was remarkably clear. The clouds, which had obscured his mental vision during the past few weeks, had been dispelled. His failing memory suddenly became almost terrible in its precision. It seemed to him that he had never before been able to view either the past or present with such wonderful accuracy. His whole life was spread out before him like a panorama seen from a great height through a crystal atmosphere, but with this difference, that the most distant parts of it were as vivid as those which lay close to him.

And as he looked back, taking, as it were, a bird's-eye view of all his life from boyhood to the present time, he was able to see clearly the relations of every part to the whole, and understand much that was previously hidden from him. He saw that his failure to accomplish his great work was the natural result of breaking the oath he had sworn to George Crawshay. In the fervour of his religious enthusiasm he had believed that a fresh oath,

sworn to God, had absolved him from his former vow. He had believed that it would be wicked to take his own life, when there was so much good work that he could do in the world. But now he saw why he had failed. The gigantic edifice that he had raised so proudly to the skies had crashed down about his head, and the woman that Crawshay wished to avenge had been the means of its destruction.

But God had used other weapons to destroy him. He had used the natural and moral law, which ordains that the wages of sin is death. The sins and excesses of Rakehell Gaunt had done their work in accordance with the laws of nature. He had broken down both bodily and mentally, at an age when the follies of early youth begin to tell on a man's constitution. The pure and simple life in the desert had given him a new lease of life and strength. But it had only been given to him for a time. He was now reaping the harvest he had sown, and neither repentance, nor piety, nor religious fervour, were of any avail against the natural and inexorable law. He recalled the words he had used: "I will not consider myself absolved from my oath till he is dead."

And again: "May the dead rise up against me and destroy me if I do not keep my oath."

The dead had risen up against him and destroyed his work—dead sins, women who had died out of his life.

But though his work was destroyed, he was still alive. There was even a life of domestic peace and happiness before him, for he knew that Lady Betty loved him so well that she would marry him in spite of all that had occurred. A year's rest would make another man of him. Perhaps he had not many years to live, but they could be lived in quiet and comparative luxury; they would be brightened by the love of a good woman; they might even be of value to the world. He could help Lady Betty in her work—that quiet practical work which was so much

more lasting than the wild fury of religious enthusiasm. But his oath would not be fulfilled. He would not be absolved from it till he was dead.

The bar of grey light broadened in the east and slowly changed to a bar of gold. The mountains stood out against it—a dark line of smooth curves and rugged peaks. Overhead the stars vanished in the coming of the dawn.

Father Francis rolled over on his side and looked at the scene, which was gradually emerging from the shadows in the valleys beneath—at the grey crags, at the long slopes of smooth grass, at the woods still lower down, at the white farmhouses, at the estuary of the Llyn, with its fringes of sand and marshland. It was all dim and indefinite, but fraught with the promise of gorgeous beauty.

Then the sun raised itself from behind the yellow clouds which hung over Moel y Giefr, and the light of it blazed forth on Aran Cawddy. The grey rock was tinged with gold, and the drops of dew on the lichen and scanty herbage glittered like diamonds.

Father Francis raised himself on one elbow and drank in the scene, as though the sight of it gave hope of a new life. Then he lay back on the rock and closed his eyes, and the sun rose higher and higher into the heavens, till the moisture dried on the blades of grass, and the stone felt warm to the touch of the man's outstretched hand.

He was too weak to return by the precipitous and dangerous path which led to the summit of this mountain. The place was hardly ever visited by tourists, for it lay far away from the recognized haunts of these gregarious folk. No shepherd had occasion to scale the barren crags in search of his lost sheep, for no animal would ever have strayed there in search of food. The place was nothing but a naked spur of rock that had thrust itself out of the green slopes beneath it. A man might lie there for many weeks, and no one would find him unless they came in search of him.

And Father Francis knew that no one would seek him out on that lonely height. He had said good-bye to his last disciple at Aberllyn. The man, old and weary, had been unable to walk any farther, and had sought shelter in the workhouse. There was no one left to care if the discredited preacher lived or died. Lady Betty would care, but she did not even know that he was in Wales.

It would be easy enough to die on Aran Cawddy without the violent act of suicide. He had only to lie there and wait till death released him from his agony.

Yet it would be easy enough to live, if he wished to do so. Close to his hand lay the tall staff, which he always carried with him on his journeys. He could fasten a piece of white clothing to the end of it and wedge the other end firmly in a crevice of the rock by his side. The signal would be seen for miles, and would probably be answered within an hour. Less than five hundred feet below him, one of the mountain shepherds passed daily with his dog.

Father Francis did not open his eyes as the sunlight streamed down upon his face. Life lay within his grasp, but he did not move to take it. For a while he had pleasant visions of the future, of domestic happiness, of quietude and rest, and the love of a good woman. But he thrust the visions from his mind. There would be rest for him on the summit of the mountain ere many days had passed. And what right had he to live? His life had been forfeit for many years. So long as he could do good in the world, it was perhaps allowable for him to put off the day of his death. But he was of no more use for the work he had set himself to do. Both brain and body were giving way. He was faced with the prospect of insanity. He had broken the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, and it only remained to suffer the punishment.

And yet he desired to live, for life still held something

for him, and the instinct of self-preservation is common to all living creatures.

The sun crept up to its highest point in the heavens, and began to move down towards the west. And Father Francis still lay with closed eyes, waiting for the judgment of God. He had resolved to leave himself in the hands of the Maker of the laws. He would do nothing to save his own life, but God would save it, if He wished it to serve any good purpose in the world. Some shepherd, some stray tourist, would be sent to that lonely height, perhaps even some one would come there to look for him.

If no one came, he would understand that it was right and proper for him to die. And he would have kept the oath that he had sworn to George Crawshay.

All through the day he never opened his eyes, lest the beauty of the world might tempt him to falter in his firm resolve. But he lay there with parched lips and aching limbs, praying that God might save his life.

There was complete silence on that rocky spur of the mountain—a silence that was only broken by the feeble moan that every now and then came from the lips of the man who suffered and waited for the judgment.

The sun sank down into the sea, and the western sky, flecked with fleecy clouds, was a gorgeous vista of crimson and rose colour and gold. It was a particularly glorious sunset, due perhaps to a volcanic eruption more than a thousand miles away. But Father Francis saw none of its glories; his eyes were closed; his mind was far away in the past, and his lips moved in prayer.

And then came the darkness, and the man opened his eyes and looked at the sky. It was covered with clouds and there was not a star to be seen. The moon had not yet risen from behind the mountains.

His suffering was intense, but he bore it with superb heroism. Fifty yards from him there was a precipice, a sheer fall of six hundred feet. The ground sloped to the

edge of it. It would perhaps be possible to roll towards it and end his pain. But he conquered the desire to anticipate the judgment of God. The Maker of the laws should decide whether he was to live or die.

An hour later the moon rose, and, as Father Francis looked at the clouds, he saw the shadow of a cross in the sky.

"O God," he whispered, "have mercy upon my soul." And then his pain suddenly vanished, and his body was at rest, and his mind was filled with a great calm.

And then he slept, and the moon, bursting through the clouds, lit up his face with her white radiance. And the face was gentle and peaceful as that of a little child.

On the summit of Aran Cawddy there rises a column more than a hundred feet in height. The stones were hewn out of the rock of the mountain, and the pillar can be seen from six counties in Wales. It was placed there by Lady Betty Drake, who purchased the mountain on which it stands.

On a small bronze tablet at the base there is the following inscription:

IN LOVING MEMORY

OF

FATHER FRANCIS

WHO DIED ON THIS SPOT

And then the words which the man had used at the House of Rest, when speaking of himself:

"GOD CALLED HIM."

